

VOL. 111
ISSN 0032-6178

Price: Rs. 8.00
Printed on 1 April 2006

APRIL
2006



PRABUDDHA BHARATA *or* **AWAKENED INDIA**

A Monthly Journal of the Ramakrishna Order
Started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



"As peak after peak of this Father of Mountains began to appear before my sight...the mind reverted to that one eternal theme which the Himalayas always teach us...which is reverberating in the very atmosphere of the place — renunciation!"

ISSN 0032-6178





Monthly Journal of Ramakrishna Order
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

PRABUDDHA BHARATA

APRIL 2006

CONTENTS

Traditional Wisdom	229	The Cruel Teens	245
This Month	230	<i>Dr Jayanti Basu</i>	
<i>Editorial: Crime and Punishment-II</i>	231	Drugs and Criminal Behaviour ...	260
<i>Prabuddha Bharata-100 Years Ago</i>	234	<i>Dr Uday Chaudhuri & Dr Anirban Basu</i>	
Experiences in Correctional Homes	235	Life Enhancement	263
<i>Swami Divyananda</i>		<i>Swami Brahmeshananda</i>	
A Window into the Mind	241	Ramakrishna: His Name and the Science of Japa	267
Message from the Chambal Valley	245	<i>Swami Chetanananda</i>	
<i>Dr S N Subba Rao</i>		Violated Divinity	272
The Criminal Mind	249	Reviews	274
<i>Prof. Somnath Bhattacharyya</i>		Reports	278

Internet edition at: www.advaitaashrama.org

Editorial Office:
Prabuddha Bharata
Advaita Ashrama
P.O. Mayavati, Via. Lohaghat
Dt. Champawat-262 524
Uttaranchal, India
E-mail: awakened@rediffmail.com

Publication Office:
Advaita Ashrama
5 Dehi Entally Road, Kolkata-700 014
Phs: 91• 33 • 22440898 / 22452383 /
22164000/ 22450050
E-mail: advaita@vsnl.com &
mail@advaitaashrama.org

Cover: Sunset over the Garhwal range, Himalayas, with Swami Vivekananda's quotation in the foreground.

उत्तिष्ठत
जाग्रत
प्राप्य
वरान्निबोधत ।

PRABUDDHA BHARATA

Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!

Vol. 111

APRIL 2006

No. 4

Traditional Wisdom

ŚĪLA: VIRTUE

ऐश्वर्यस्य विभूषणं चतुरता शौर्यस्य वाक्संयमो
रूपस्योपशमः श्रुतस्य विनयो वित्तस्य पात्रे व्ययः ।
अक्रोधस्तपसः क्षमा प्रभवतो धर्मस्य निर्व्याजता
सर्वेषामपि सर्वसाधनमिदं शीलं परं भूषणम् ॥

Dexterity is the ornament of affluence, restraint in speech of valour, self-control of beauty, humility of learning, discerning philanthropy of wealth, freedom from anger of austerity, forgiveness of power, and straightforwardness of righteousness. [But] virtue, the universal means to all of these, is the greatest jewel.

वह्निस्तस्य जलायते जलनिधिः कुल्यायते तत्क्षणात्
मेरुः स्वल्पशिलायते मृगपतिः सद्यः कुरङ्गायते ।
व्यालो मात्स्यगुणायते विषरसः पीयूषवर्षायते
यस्याङ्गेऽखिललोकवल्लभतमं शीलं समुन्मीलति ॥

Fire turns cold, the ocean becomes a ditch in a moment, Mount Meru turns into a pebble and the king of beasts into a deer; the serpent is transformed into a garland and poison into an ambrosial shower—for one on whose person virtue, the supreme desirable, makes its appearance.

A suspicious mind sees evil everywhere, a trusting mind sees only good. ... A quarrelsome person constantly finds something to quarrel about; a peaceful person finds no one to quarrel with. I find so many people here with fixed notions. They have one set idea that colours everything. ... Some people always want to argue. They often have little brain, cannot see a point, still they must argue. Then there are over-sensitive persons. They are always on the defensive. ... All these are causes for evil. But the evil is not in the world, it is in the persons. It is all a matter of misunderstanding. If we understood each other better there would be less evil. (Swami Turiyananda)

∞ This Month ∞

Crime and Punishment - II, is our editorial overview of the complex interplay of dispositional and situational forces that underly criminal behaviour and form the focus of this number.

Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago features this journal's rejoinder to the views of the social philosopher Benjamin Kidd on individual and social interests.

In the concluding part of **Experiences in Correctional Homes** Swami Divyanandaji, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Malda, gives us a glimpse into the Ramakrishna Mission's work for social harmony and individual growth through self-help among the inmates of various correctional homes of West Bengal.

A Window into the Mind provides a glimpse of efforts at creative art by correctional-home inmates.

Message from the Chambal Valley is Dr S N Subba Rao's succinct portrayal of the conditions and forces that have systematically fostered banditry in the Chambal Valley and the reasons why the problem remains difficult to eradicate. An eminent Gandhian, the author has been actively involved with the rehabilitation of the Chambal dacoits for nearly four decades.

The mental make-up of the criminal has always been a source of interest and intrigue. Is the criminal cast in a distinct psychological mould? Or can any mind be perverted into criminality? These questions have been analysed from a psychoanalytic point of view by Prof. Somnath Bhattacharyya, a leading psychoanalyst and former Head, Department of

Psychology, University of Calcutta, in **The Criminal Mind**.

The Cruel Teens is an insightful psychological reappraisal of the ubiquitous problem of adolescent violence. The author, Dr Jayanti Basu, Reader in Applied Psychology, Calcutta University, provides us an understanding of the genesis of this 'problem' and the means to its control.

Dr Uday Chaudhuri and Dr Anirban Basu, Consultant Psychiatrists, Vivekananda Institute of Medical Sciences and Institute for Mental Health Awareness, Research and Rehabilitation, Kolkata, provide us some fresh food for thought about **Drugs and Criminal Behaviour**.

Increasing the duration of life and improving its quality are the primary concerns of health professionals. But what are the costs? And how do we actually improve quality? These pertinent issues have been lucidly analysed by Swami Brahmeshanandaji, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Chandigarh, in his article **Life Enhancement**.

Sri Ramakrishna's name is central to the spiritual practices of the Ramakrishna Order. Swami Chetananandaji, Minister-in-Charge, Vedanta Society of St Louis, dwells on the spiritual significance of this relationship in the first instalment of **Ramakrishna: His Name and the Science of Japa**.

In the concluding part of **Violated Divinity** we get to see a spark of the Divine amidst the arid routine of a convict, forsaken and forgotten by society. The narrative is an adapted translation of an extract from the Bengali work *Louhakatapat* by 'Jarasandha'.

Crime and Punishment - II

EDITORIAL

Whose Fault Is It?

Kiran Bedi is an iconic figure in Indian policing. She has brought out 'a unique collection of uncensored narrations volunteered by individuals who had nothing to declare but their wrong past—each one a reservoir of painful experiences. These persons—men, women, adolescents, and even children—had the courage to tell what went wrong in their lives; to what extent they themselves were responsible, and to what extent the external circumstances were beyond their control.' Significantly, the book is titled *What Went Wrong?*

This is what one of her interlocutors—an addict and a pilferer—had to say: 'My name is Shakku. I am four years old. I am a student in a *gali* school [a non-formal centre for slum children]. My teacher is Mr Gopal. I read. I also write. I play in the mud. My father has many cycle rickshaws. My mother runs our *paan* shop. I have seven brothers and sisters. I have the habit of drinking liquor. But now I have left it. I left it yesterday. My father used to give me liquor. The *rickshaw-wallahs* who come home also make me drink alcohol with them. My brother eats *gutka* [an addictive substance]. Our elder brother taught him this habit. (*His brother, 6 years, frowns and hits Shakku, saying that he too has left eating gutka. Shakku tells us he is lying and that he consumed it just yesterday.*).' After her study of cases like Shakku's Mrs Bedi concludes: 'I clearly see these lives exposing the apathy and callous neglect of those responsible for sufferings which were seemingly inevitable, but certainly preventable.'

Contrast Shakku with Rodrick Ferrel of Kentucky who was sentenced to death in 1998 for proclaiming himself a vampire and murdering a middle-aged couple with a crowbar. The murder was carried out at the instance of

Heather Wendorf, the murdered couple's daughter, so that she could steal their sport utility vehicle and run away from home. Six hours before the murders Rodrick, 16, and Heather, 15, sat in a cemetery and drank each other's blood so that she could become a vampire in his group and he could fortify himself to kill.

Now consider Shahzad Tanweer, a baby-faced youth of twenty-two, who was one of the four suicide bombers implicated in the London bombings of 7 July 2005. 'Tanweer was a noble soul', his uncle Tahir Pervaiz recalled. 'He was a shy and simple guy who would never be involved in a heinous crime like a suicide bombing.' The last time he visited his uncle in Pakistan he stuck close to home, reading books and chatting to his cousins and other locals. He prayed five times a day, fasted once a week, and often led the Friday prayers at the mosque. He 'embraced life' and never talked about getting involved in terrorist activities.

We are all likely to sympathize with Shakku, born as he is in an environment highly unfavourable for healthy psycho-social development. The bizarre and gruesome behaviour of Rodrick Ferrel is likely to convince us, as it did his judges, that evil was ingrained in his personality. And if we had known Shahzad Tanweer, we would probably have wondered with his uncle how such an apparently nice and harmless person could be motivated to such destructive behaviour. The Hindi version of Mrs Bedi's compilation is titled *Galti Kiski?* (Whose Fault Is It?). This question is especially apt as it provokes us to delve deeper into the causes of deviant behaviour. And as we do that we are likely to be confronted with facts that can challenge even the apparently straightforward conclusions that we have drawn about Shakku and Ferrel.

Disposition v Situation

Traditionally social scientists, psychologists as well as non-specialists have tried to locate the causes of antisocial or non-normative behaviour in the mental make-up or personal disposition of the individual. This has especially been true of societies that lay greater stress on individual qualities and achievements rather than on collective values and responsibility. Moreover, as individuals are accepted to have a free will, they are expected to be responsible for their actions. This is a basic premise in all judicial proceedings. Then there are biological arguments in favour of dispositional orientations. Aggression is a basic animal instinct that has been carried over to humans for its survival value. Also, a positive correlation has been demonstrated between the levels of the male hormone testosterone in blood and the tendency towards aggression. In fact, castration (surgical or chemical) is still in use as a means to control excessively violent individuals. Finally, the entire concept of correction is based on the possibility of behaviour modification, the alteration of maladaptive responses through learning pro-social behaviour.

The basic train of events culminating in antisocial behaviour has been elegantly outlined in the Gita: When one dwells on sense objects, attachment is produced; from attachment arises desire; and desire [when thwarted] results in anger. Anger leads to delusion, which results in confusion of memory, loss of discrimination and ultimate ruin. A key component in this chain is the desire-anger link. It is frustration of desire that causes anger and this leads to aggressive behaviour. This is the famous *frustration-aggression hypothesis* which has long been accepted by psychologists as an important explanation of violence. Implicit in this hypothesis is a balance of dispositional forces that tend towards aggression and the external frustrators that elicit violent response. Often these external factors may not be simple impediments to satisfaction of desire but positive provocations to violence. Verbal insults or aggressive posturing

can elicit an aggressive response from virtually anyone.

An important evidence for the significant role that external situational factors play in abetting antisocial behaviour is the fact that murder rates are found to be more than a hundred times higher in some countries when compared to others. Again, literally hundreds of studies have demonstrated a direct correlation between exposure to violence in the media and aggressive behaviour. Lastly, uncomfortable environmental conditions like high ambient temperatures, overcrowding and irritant noise have all been shown to lower the threshold for aggressive outbursts.

The most intriguing pointers to the complex interrelationship between dispositional and situational elements in the genesis of anti-social activity are provided by persons like Shahzad Tanweer—an ordinary person by all accounts—committing extremely violent and self-destructive acts. Recent studies on suicide bombers have busted their mythical image as poor, illiterate, desperate and socially isolated fatalists. Instead they are more often found to be highly intelligent, often affluent, attractive and sociable young men and women with happy family and community bonds. Although terrorism as a global phenomenon has attracted much attention in recent times, the fact that ideological indoctrination can motivate even ordinary normal individuals to highly cruel and destructive acts is not new to our times. Many of the men and women who carried out mass executions in Hitler's Germany, tortures in the gulags of Stalin's Russia, or the purges during the Chinese Cultural Revolution under Mao Zedong were 'as ordinary as can be imagined'. And these are only modern versions of events consistently recurring throughout history.

Social psychologists have tried to figure out the conditions that elicit such 'abnormal' reactions from 'normal' people. In 1974, Stanley Milgram used an instrument called the *aggression machine* to show the extremely high rates of compliance to demands from an au-

thority figure to 'shock' an innocent victim to a maximum possible level (this maximum being 450 volts) under the pretext of making the victim learn a task. In subsequent investigations Milgram and others were able to show that compliance to unjust demands to engage in harmful behaviour could be elicited from otherwise responsible citizens under a variety of conditions: offering an ideology (like combating a threat to national security or to one's religion), arranging contractual obligations to behave in a particular way, assigning meaningful roles (leader, coach, etc.), creating a framework of rules to be followed (usually arbitrary, which can be used to justify a given behaviour), replacing reality with rhetoric, allowing diffusion of responsibility for harmful results, graded increase in the resultant harm (beginning with apparently innocuous acts like shocking a person with 20 volts), making the authority figure appear 'just', at least initially, and making 'exit' from the given situation difficult or costly.

In another path-breaking study in 1974—the Stanford Prison Experiment—Philip Zimbardo and colleagues persuasively highlighted how institutional and systemic power can corrupt. Pacifist young men placed in a simulated prison setting were found to behave 'sadistically in their role of guards, inflicting humiliation and pain and suffering on other young men if they had the inferior human status of a prisoner. Some guards even reported they were enjoying doing so. Others, who had been intelligent, healthy college students were behaving pathologically, many having "emotional breakdowns", as in stress disorders, so extreme that five of them had to be terminated within that first week. Their fellow prisoners who adapted better to the situation were those who mindlessly followed orders, became blindly obedient to authority, who allowed the guards to dehumanize and degrade them ever more with each passing day and night.' The two-week experiment had to be terminated on the sixth day because of the pathology the experimenters were witnessing which included

the principal investigator himself behaving like a prison superintendent rather than a detached experimenter. These and similar other findings convinced Zimbardo that 'the line between good and evil lies in the centre of every human heart' as pointed out by Alexander Solzhenitsyn.

How Does All This Help?

Knowing that anyone of us can, under certain circumstances, end up doing the 'unimaginable' should not only prevent us from judging others from a high moral stand but should also make us circumspect about conditions that foster moral disengagement and antisocial behaviour. More importantly we need to look for and cultivate personal traits and social conditions that encourage healthy pro-social activity. Psychologists have not objectively studied these healthy conditions as closely as they have the negative ones, yet Zimbardo suggests several steps towards promotion of civic virtues based largely on extrapolations from the data of Milgram and others: encouraging mindfulness and a sense of personal responsibility, acceptance of one's mistakes and errors in judgement, critical thinking (especially to differentiate rhetoric from reality), learning to distinguish just from unjust authority, and knowing when independent thinking should take precedence over group conformity. At a social level one needs to promote conditions that make people feel special rather than anonymous (the latter encourages antisocial behaviour, as in crowds). Appreciation and promotion of human diversity to discourage prejudice and derogation of others, discouraging even minor transgressions like cheating, lying, teasing and bullying, and recognizing and rewarding model social behaviour can all help promote our social sense.

Many of the aforementioned concepts have been explicated in the thought-provoking essays in this number. If these help us understand and gain greater control of the unedifying aspects of our person and society then our efforts will have been amply rewarded. *

Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago

April 1906

At the Royal Institution, London, in the first week of February, the well-known social philosopher, Mr. Benjamin Kidd gave the first of two lectures on the 'Significance of the Future in the Theory of Evolution'. We are indebted to the London *Times* for the following abstract of the lectures:

'... A species was a group that bred among itself, in which nature was continually mixing the hereditary qualities of the component individuals. In this way she got a group that was at once plastic and rigid—plastic in so far as it was continuously adjusting itself to meet varying conditions, and rigid so far as it was able to maintain itself amid the changing circumstances of the world around it. This group represented an effort on her part to organize efficiency, the interests of the individual being subordinated by those of the group. Similarly, in what might be called the family or parental group, the future became more important than the past. At first the egg was cast away naked and unprotected; then the food-matter with which it was provided grew larger and larger, becoming enormous in the case of birds; finally the egg was nourished inside the body of the parent Low down in nature, among social insects, such as bees and wasps, there was an attempt to secure an organized social group, through differentiation depending on the circumstance that different treatment at an immature stage of development was able in those cases to produce differing individuals. But only in human society could we see the whole possibility of efficiency of organized groups, the differentiation resting on mind. Here again, until recently, the individual has not been conceived of as subordinate to the group. But it was not the interests of the individual, but those of society as a whole, that were important, because society must be more efficient and able to do more than individuals, and theories of politics and economics that did not take account of this fact would need revision.'

[That] the interests of the individual when they conflict with those of society must be sacrificed, is the burden of Mr. Kidd's teaching. It is however useful to remember that society is made up of individuals, and the interests of the individual, barring only a few exceptions, are identical with those of society. The efficiency of a society is built upon those efficiencies of its component individuals which are not anti-social. The individual therefore should be given all liberty to grow and to go ahead. He is to be checked only when his conduct jeopardises the *real* well-being of society in some way. No efficiency is possible without growth, and no growth without liberty.

Unlike the West, where, 'until recently, the individual had not been conceived of as subordinate to the group', in India from the ancient times, the individual was well—perhaps too well—subordinated to the group. The result of the subordination, viz., organisation of society, was no doubt achieved. No doubt Hindu society, in the past was, and in the present to a great extent is, a wonderful piece of organisation. But at the same time, no one can fail to see what lack of individual growth and efficiency has reduced it to. A kind of level, the result of organisation, has been reached by all the great divisions of our society in every part of this large country, but it is a dull and dead level. Our society is helpless before new conditions. It has lost its flexibility and is unable to adapt itself to the changes of the times. It moves along creaking and groaning, in the ruts it has worn out for itself, strongly resembling a vehicle which is still peculiarly Indian. To continue the metaphor, it is heedless of the better roads and swifter and more comfortable means of locomotion that are constantly springing up around it. How long can it go on like this?

—Occasional Notes

Experiences in Correctional Homes

SWAMI DIVYANANDA

(Continued from the previous issue)

20 March 2005 was the day of the public celebration of Sri Ramakrishna's birth anniversary at Belur Math, and lakhs of devotees had thronged the Math premises. An unusual sight was provided by a



Sri Ramakrishna's birth anniversary celebrations at Belur Math

handcuffed man moving about on the Math premises with several guards by his side. On enquiry we found out that he was Shyamal Khawas, an inmate of Medinipur District Correctional Home. We also learnt from Shyamal that he was a regular subscriber to *Udbodhan*, the Bengali monthly of the Ramakrishna Order, and that he also sent regular donations for Math activities. He had applied for mantra diksha and was awaiting his turn. He had taken special permission from the Inspector General of Correctional Services to attend this function. He offered pranams at all the temples on the Math grounds and then gave Rs 20 as donation. He also purchased some books from the bookstall. We presented a large laminated photo of Sri Ramakrishna to Shyamal. He touched it to his head and as he clasped it to his heart his

eyes turned moist. As he walked over to take prasad, the sub-inspector accompanying him had his handcuffs removed. 'I don't want him to take prasad with these on', he said.

11 June 2005 was a special day at Mother's House on 1 Udbodhan Lane in Bagbazar, Kolkata. The Ramakrishna Math there was celebrating the anniversary of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi's arrival at this house, her permanent residence in Kolkata. Shyamal had got permission to attend this function too. This time five other fellow inmates accompanied him. They too were regular subscribers to *Udbodhan*. All of them donated money from their jail savings to the Math's work and Shyamal purchased a set of *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* to take back with him.

Many inmates, whether Hindu, Muslim or Christian, visit the Malda Ashrama after release, usually with their families. Some of them come to inform us of their release before going home. All the students of the literacy programme are given books like *Sabar Swamiji* (Swami Vivekananda for All) on release. The



Exhibition on Swami Vivekananda at Malda jail

inmates also receive invitations to the Ashrama's functions.

The 150th birth anniversary of Sri Sarada Devi was celebrated in Malda and Balurghat correctional homes. The inmates participated with songs, recitation of poems and talks on Holy Mother and her teachings. About three hundred devotees joined the inmates in the celebrations as did the district magistrate and senior police officials. Devotees and monastics did the cooking and serving, and all partook of the prasad sitting together.

Beyond Religious Affiliations

Men and women of all religious affiliations easily identify with the liberal teachings of



Observing Id-ul-Fitr at Malda jail

Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda. The Muslim inmates of the correctional homes say, 'Mother is our very own.' But the classes and celebrations at the correctional homes are not restricted to the teachings of the above three alone. Inmates conduct readings from the Quran, Bible, Buddha's life, and other religious texts.

Malda District Correctional Home has many Muslim inmates. Id is celebrated there with all inmates joining in, irrespective of religion. The Ashrama provides fruits, sweets, cakes, and other eatables for Iftar during the Ramzan fasts. Monks and devotees join in these celebrations.



Meeting on religious harmony at Malda jail

All our programmes are voluntarily attended by all inmates. At the Krishnanagar correctional home the superintendent, Janab H Alam, told us, 'Maharaj, many other teachers had come here earlier. Their classes would begin with two hundred inmates and end up with just two or three. With your programmes we find the numbers increasing instead of decreasing.' Our universal and non-sectarian approach has helped the inmates relate to us irrespective of their creeds.

Our interactive session at Alipore Central Correctional Home lasts for two hours. One day I had work elsewhere and had to leave thirty minutes earlier. The inmates protested, 'Maharaj, your schedule is for two hours. Please don't reduce this. We get great mental peace during the time that you are here.' Since then we have always tried to give them as much of our time as possible and



Inmates of Malda jail at a meeting

the inmates too have responded with great enthusiasm.

Our volunteers include both Hindus and Muslims. Several inmates have also joined us as volunteers. The teachers at the Malda correctional home include inmates like Ishaq Muhammad and Muhammad Hakim. In all our programmes we request the inmates to have a session of singing at the end. On one such occasion at the Alipore correctional home, first a Hindu inmate, Krishnapada Mandal, came forward to sing '*Mon re krishi kaj jano na; O mind! You know not how to farm.*' I asked him if he knew the song '*Sakali tomar ichchha; All is Thy will.*' He did not remember the song in full, but another inmate, Dr Pranatosh Mukherjee, did. He came up and sang the song with great emo-



Recreation as an aid to communal harmony

Working for Harmony

We tell the inmates, 'One arrangement in the correctional homes is heavenly. We see you having your beds on the floor, lying side by side, making no distinction of religious or caste affiliations. All of you share in the cooking and eat the same food. One inmate's distress or need evokes sympathetic response from all. Let us pray that just as we live harmoniously within the jail, let there be harmony in the outside world too. Let no Hindu cause pain to a Muslim or a Christian, nor a Muslim or a Christian cause hurt to a Hindu. Let there be no communal feelings amongst us. Let us always remember that as humans we are one. Let us also pray for and think of the welfare of all. Let us pray for our sick brothers. Let us tell our visiting relatives and friends also to do the same.'

Mr Guin, the superintendent of the Balurghat correctional home, is of Nepali descent. He told us, 'Swamiji, I keep track of people who



A cultural function in progress at Howrah jail

tion. After this Rahmat Piyada got up and sang '*Sakaler majhe muhammad, kabay masjid giye ki hobe, manusher seba karo;* Muhammad is in the midst of all. What is the use of going to Kaaba or to a mosque? Serve people instead.' Next a Christian youth sang a song that he himself had composed: '*Jesu amar baba, jesu amar ma, jesui amar sab, tini amay koto diyechhen, ami take ki diyechhi, baki jibone jeno ar tar kachhe kichhu bhiksha na kori, ami jeno tar jonye kichhu dite pari;* Jesus is my father, Jesus is my mother, Jesus alone is my all. He has given me so much, what have I given him? May I not beg anything of him for the rest of my life; may I be able to give something for him.'



Meditation session at Malda jail

leave our jail. I find these people preaching the human values and liberal religious sentiments that you have inculcated in them. They are virtually instruments of your cause.' Mr Guin is now a regular attendee at the Balurghat Ramakrishna Ashrama (another unaffiliated centre) functions as are many former prison inmates. Many of them had been drug traffickers or murderers, but now they can walk into the Ashrama with their heads held high, having successfully overcome their past. They had earlier been social outcasts and had preferred living at the fringe of society. Now they feel more confident in entering the social mainstream, and the local society too is more receptive to them.



An inmate speaks on Independence Day at Malda jail

They include people of all religions. Devotees of the Ashrama also consider these people their very own.

Self-help

At one Independence Day celebration Hakim Master said, 'The Ramakrishna Mission is doing so much for us. Can we also not do something?' This initiative resulted in the total-literacy programme of the Malda correctional home. At first no writing material was provided from the Ashrama, for we wanted to make sure that their enthusiasm was genuine and lasting. But the inmates showed their ingenuity by using the floor for slates. It was only then that we supplied blackboards and 200 slates for the



Inaugurating a literacy and value-education unit at Islampur jail

programme. The Rotary Club has donated colour television sets to all wards of the jail, but the inmates decided to forgo the evening TV programmes for the literacy classes. Each class consists of half an hour of reading from an inspiring book and two hours of literacy training. On their evening rounds the jailors are now treated to the sounds of *a, aa, ka, kha* from some rooms and *chalo, bolo, karo* from others, and when they look in they find the inmates engrossed in their studies. These night classes have been specially availed of by the elderly inmates who feel shy to attend the daytime literacy programme. Hakim Master has set the target that on release every inmate must sign his name and go out reading Swami Vivekananda's books. The literacy rate of Malda district is 50-55% whereas every individual leaving the Malda correctional home at present is literate.



Inmates learn bookbinding at Malda jail

In the other correctional homes too we have been able to achieve a significant rise in literacy. While most of the classes of the literacy programme are in Bengali, at the Howrah correctional home a Hindi literacy class has been started for Hindi-speaking inmates.

Akhtar Hussain and Mehmud are awaiting trial for train dacoity and murder. Inspired by the story of Pavhari Baba and the robber, narrated during one of our classes, Akhtar resolved to lead an honest life on release. He picked up hairdressing from the jail barber. While on bail, he borrowed Rs 12,000 from his father and set up a salon in his village Bamungram of Shujapur area, ten kilometres from Malda town. At our request he took Mehmud as his assistant. The trial judges and correctional-home authorities too have been very sympathetic towards these efforts of Akhtar and Mehmud. Mehmud has been provided with a salon chair, a mirror and a hairdressing kit from the Ashrama. Akhtar now earns Rs 5,000-Rs 6,000 every month. He is now married and has a son. He feels more confident about making an honest living and also more responsible. His parents are happy and his family members spared of the harassment resulting from police enquiries. The villagers are also happy to see one of them successfully rebuild his life. Whenever he comes to Malda to attend court hearings once every two to three months, Akhtar visits the Ashrama and requests us to pray for him that he may continue to be honest.

Malda is a flood-prone district and the Ashrama has to conduct flood relief virtually every year. Several released inmates have come forward and helped us in this relief work, even

bringing us water and tea. On one occasion our vehicle carrying relief supplies broke down. A stranger approached us and asked if he should get a mechanic to repair it. When asked who he was, he said he was a student of ours, Sanjay Mandal by name. 'In which school did you study?' we asked him. 'In the jail school', he replied. 'I had been to the Ashrama soon after my release and bought some books from the book-stall, for I have now become addicted to books.' Sanjay had been convicted of pickpocketing. He was now working in a nearby mango orchard, and he ran over to his hut to get and show us the books he had purchased. We asked him, 'Your work in the orchard lasts only three to four months a year. What do you do the rest of the year?' 'I am saving some money and shall

set up a grocery', he replied. Incidentally, with an initial capital of Rs 2,000-Rs 3,000 one can earn the same amount monthly by selling grocery. The income can even go up to Rs 10,000 if one works hard at it. A woman inmate has in fact become self-supporting after the Ashrama



*Tailoring trainees of Krishnanagar jail
with the ready-to-wear children's garments*

provided her this initial capital.

Our programme at the Seuri correctional home was started in April 2005 and a library was opened there the next month. On that occasion the inmates were also given books. A week later one of the inmates who had read the book *Ami Ma, Sakaler Ma* (I Am Mother, the Mother of All) came and told us, 'Swamiji, if only I had come across this book when I was young, I would not have got into the world of crime. Now I realize my mistake. When I am released I shall try my best to make an honest living. We shall be honest by all means. May the blessings of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi

and Swami Vivekananda be on us.'

Expression of Thanks

Sonajuri of Malda district is a Santhal village. We had organized a health-awareness camp there. A young man, slightly drunk, landed up at the camp, a small wooden vina in hand. Playing on his vina he sang out, 'Swamiji, you have come! You have converted the local jail into my maternal uncle's and in-laws' house! Now I feel like committing more offenses and getting back in there! The food is good there now and the stay is good. There is a library; people are getting literacy and manual training. Now I feel like returning there to get some training and set up a business!'

The day Akhtar's salon was inaugurated, Sri Joydeb Chakraborty, Inspector General of Correctional Services, West Bengal, telephoned us saying he felt like getting himself jailed for some 'technical' offense! 'We hardly get any free time. I wish I could avail of the library and read and meditate like the inmates.'

At Malda the inmates raise vegetables, greens and some fruits within the correctional-home campus. They decided that they ought to give something to the Ashrama in return for the services they received. So on more than one occasion they arranged to send the jail produce as an offering to the Ashrama temple. For this, of course, they had to obtain permission from the inspector general as no jail commodity is supposed to be sent out. They even approached Sri



*Swami Shivamayanandaji
addressing the inmates of Malda jail*

Biswanath Chowdhury, the minister in charge of prisons, to permit this 'transgression' of rules. The same thing occurred at the Balurghat jail too.

Sri Biswanath Chowdhury while hoping that these welfare activities were further extended regretted that the government was unable to allocate funds for the programmes. Sri Joydeb Chakraborty has requested Swami Smarananandaji, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, to expand the work. Swami Smarananandaji as

well as Swamis Shivamayanandaji and Suhitanandaji (both Assistant Secretaries) have seen these programmes at Malda. The Mission's headquarters at Belur has approved this activity as a special programme of the Malda centre and has granted financial aid.

The work had been started with the understanding that it would not commit the government to financial aid. That still stands. For lack of publicity the programme suffers from shortage of funds. For instance, the libraries need to be expanded (life convicts say they have already finished reading the books and need fresh ones!), and more material and financial aid is needed to rehabilitate freed convicts. But given the great help that we have been receiving from all quarters, we are confident that this programme will continue to grow and will be of genuine help to individuals as well as to our society as a whole. *

P*Prison News:* The rate of imprisonment in India is 25 per 1,00,000 population. The corresponding figures for Australia, England, USA and Russia are 98, 125, 616 and 690.

There are 1,305 prisons in India having an authorized capacity of 2,14,241 inmates. 73% of the prison population in India are undertrials, and 3.18% of prisoners are women.

A Window into the Mind



Muruganantham is serving a life sentence in Cuddalore Jail in Tamil Nadu. He, along with several other prison inmates, is a regular reader of the Tamil monthly of our Order, *Sri Ramakrishna Vijayam*. A few months ago, he wrote a poem describing society's ills for *Vijayam*. He also sent a painting (left). Seeing his talent the journal wanted to remunerate him for his contribution. Muruganantham wrote back saying he had never served his old parents and they were not being cared for well enough. He wanted the

journal to send whatever amount was possible as remuneration to his mother. She was working hard to make both ends meet. Accordingly, the journal sent a token amount to the old lady living in a very remote part of Tamil Nadu.

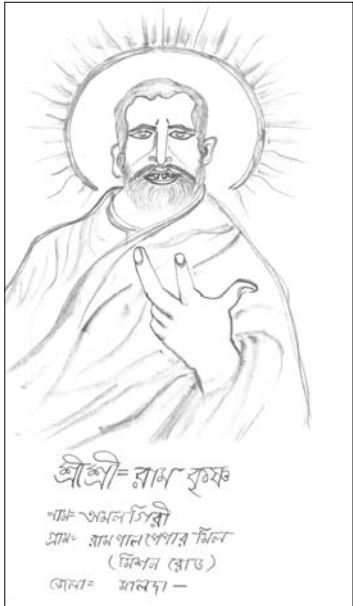
Muruganantham is an artist as well as sculptor. The bold strokes and the bright use of colours in the original painting tell us a lot about Muruganantham's character. His Tamil writing is also powerful.

Who is surfing the waves in the picture above? Why the silhouette? We can ask these and many other questions of this image.



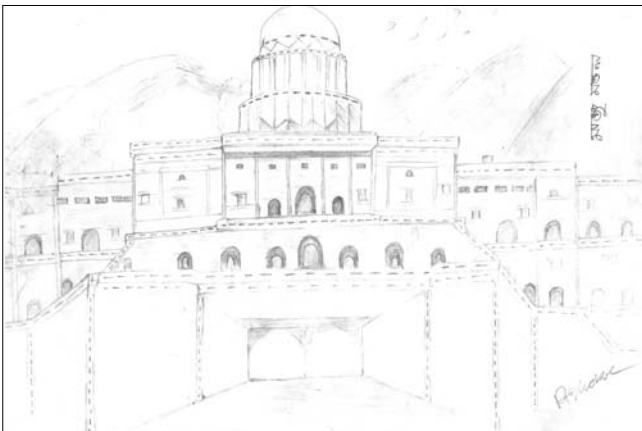
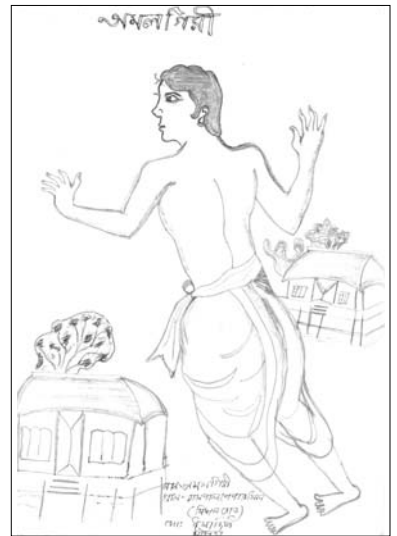
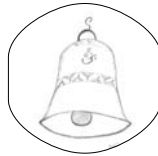
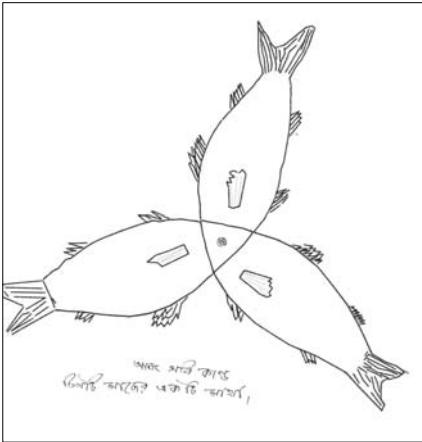
அமலாமினி
தாய் - ராம பாலசேகர அம்மா
(விண்ணிலே)





Original art forms provide a window into the mind of the artist. Art can also help in the process of catharsis or in rediscovering oneself. It therefore plays a crucial role in the process of correcting deviant behaviour. We present here a brief montage of self-expressive images from correctional-home inmates. A world of meaning can be read into these simple images. This task we leave to our readers.







ABBEY OR SANCTUARY?

In the body and mind drowned
in the depths of the ocean of sighs,
Vivekananda's joyous message
arouses hope—'A new life is at hand!'
In the arid prison, surrounded by
frightening high walls devoid of doors,
(this hope) rises and falls
in despondent hearts.
The ashrama light beckons,
sounding the call of hope—
'Hear, you shall be literate;
you shall learn to use your hands,
and once again be full humans.
This life shall not be in vain.'
The Mission has come to drive out fear
and make men out of men.
Crushing out despair and dejection,
joining hands, stepping in unison,
let us march with the Mission!

—translated from life convict Janab Abdul Hakim's
Bengali original, 'Ashram na Ashray?'

A WONDERFUL EXPERIENCE IN MY LIFE.

I was suffering from extreme frustration with my life in the correctional Home, Malda. I was spending all the bad time and hopelessness with my life. No body inspired me to be good in future. I was thinking all time about my self when I will be released from the correctional Home. But I had nothing to do.

One day a hermit came to visit to us in the correctional Home. This hermit came from the order of Ramkrishna Mission. This respected hermit made a neat little speech in the correctional Home. Hearing of his speech I was enchanted and quite changed.

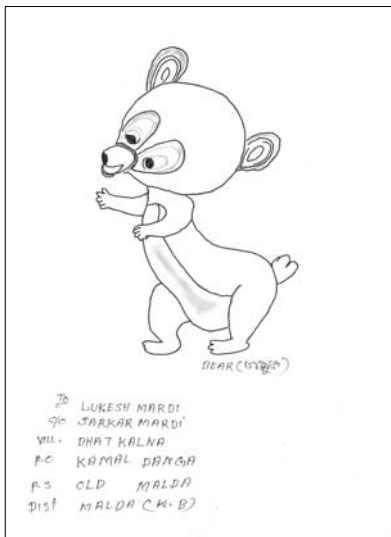
Then I was inspired by the holyman and I decided to do good for humanity in future. I also had an idea to determine to do it. I will try to do impart education and do some social service for the poor and underdeveloped people residing under prisonline province.

Hope I will be succeed in my achievement with God's will.

FARUK PATEL

s/o NAUSAD (HARI, MASTER)
vill. GORAKPUR
p.o. SADARPUR
p.s. CHANCHAL
Dist. MALDA
pin. 732123

WEST BENGAL
MALDA CORRECTIONAL DISTRICT CORRECTIONAL
HOME, WARD NO 11/B
Date: 16-7-05



To LUKESH MARDI
90 JARAK MARDI
vill. BHAT KALNA
p.o. KAMAL DARGA
p.s. OLD MALDA
Dist. MALDA (M.B.)

Message from the Chambal Valley

DR S N SUBBA RAO

Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed. —From the preamble to UNESCO's constitution.

The New Science

If only the sound-recording system were invented some years earlier, our generation would have been highly benefited, being able to listen to the golden voice of Swami Vivekananda sending positive electric shocks into our hearts and minds. But still, we are lucky that the invention was made in our times and we can listen to contemporary wisdom.

Thankfully, the late President of the Ramakrishna Order, Swami Ranganathananda, has left us a legacy of rich spiritual knowledge in cassettes containing his recorded discourses. I listen to Swami Ranganathananda's voice narrating the interesting proceedings of the seminar on 'Evolution after Darwin' held to celebrate the centenary of Charles Darwin's seminal work *On the Origin of Species*. Under the leadership of Sir Julian Huxley, the seminar came to some historic conclusions. After gifting humankind with the cerebral system, Nature told it that henceforth humans must take over from Nature the future course of evolution. While organic satisfaction, self-protection and multiplication are common concerns of the human and animal species, a special dimension that comes forth at the human level is the element of fulfilment, which finds expression when man does something that helps other beings. When fulfilment becomes the criterion, there comes the need to explore a new science at the human level—the 'science of human possibilities'. We have seen the science of physical possibilities at work in man's going to the moon, and in technological marvels like the television or the nuclear bomb. But we need to

pay greater attention to the study of the human being in depth.

The Science of Human Possibilities in the Chambal Valley

When I was the director of the *Gandhi Darshan* train during Mahatma Gandhi's birth centenary celebrations, a little money came my way. I used it to found the Mahatma Gandhi Seva Ashram. In the 1960s, the Chambal Valley was the most violent area in India. So the Ashram was founded at Loura in Morena district of Madhya Pradesh.

After our evening prayers one day, an old man of over eighty years came to me and told his sad story. His name was Bhagwan Singh Chandel. His only son and the family's bread earner was murdered by the dacoit Chhote Singh. I expressed my sympathy for him. Bhagwan Singh asked me, 'Did Chhote Singh surrender?' One hundred and eighty-five *bagis* (dacoits or highway robbers) had surrendered on two previous days at our Ashram. And I knew Chhote Singh had surrendered, because before going to prison he had made a donation of one hundred rupees (big money for the Ashram at that time!). So I said yes. Now Bhagwan Singh asked me for a favour, 'Please help me meet Chhote Singh.' I was in a fix. The whole history of the Chambal Valley was a story of revenge and counter-revenge. When X killed one man of Y's family, Y's family killed four or five people of X's family. And here was the father of a murdered man asking me to help him meet the murderer.

Though with some hesitation, I gave a letter to Bhagwan Singh, addressed to the Superintendent, Gwalior Central Prison. But I was worried about what would happen when the two met. In the prison situation, visitors and

prisoners come from opposite directions to the meeting point. When the prisoner Chhote Singh, the murderer, came face to face with the father of the victim, he being the younger of the two bowed his head in respect and touched the latter's feet. As he rose up, Chhote Singh saw tears rolling down from the eyes of the old Bhagwan Singh. Chhote Singh also began crying and with a choked voice he told Bhagwan Singh, 'Dada, if only those Sarvodaya people had come to me a few days earlier, I would not have committed this crime of killing your loved son. Now I feel helpless. All I can say is that I have committed the crime. I am sorry I cannot bring your son back to life. I am in prison. You please decide any punishment that I deserve—get me hanged, shot or whatever—and I shall gladly accept it ...'.

As both the murderer and the victim were crying, the old man told Chhote Singh, 'My son Chhote Singh, my son is dead and cannot come back to life. Now that you are alive, you must be my son.' Both of them kept crying. When the interview time was over they had to leave each other crying and sobbing.

A Human Possibility

Madho Singh was a gang leader in the Chambal Valley known for his cunning. He was the one who met Gandhiji's associate Acharya Vinoba Bhave and then Loknayak Jayaprakash Narayan with the proposal for mass surrender of Chambal dacoits. Notorious as he was for many murders and kidnaps, what inspired Madho Singh to initiate the surrender move? He told me the details.

Madho Singh's gang had kidnapped an eleven-year-old boy. As they were returning to their hideout, the gang was challenged by a police patrol and they began running. Though they were able to escape being caught, the kidnapped boy got shot in his leg during the exchange of fire. Blood was oozing from the wound, but the gang managed to run with the boy and reach its hideout in the darkness. The gang was safe, but the boy hostage was badly

wounded in the leg.

Madho Singh said, 'I could not sleep that night. What was the fault of that little boy that he should be crippled for life? We had kidnapped him for money for our own sake but the innocent boy was hurt. I was never sorry when I shot my enemies dead. But this incident made me repent for my sins. That night I decided to put an end to this wretched way of life and start a fresh life.' Thus began his search for a way to turn from being an outlaw to a peaceful person.

The Sinner's Future

There is a popular saying: 'Every saint has a past and every sinner has a future.' Working in the Chambal Valley, we could experience the meaning of this saying at first hand. Lukka the sure-shot was the successor of the legendary Man Singh. Because of his learning in Tulsi Ramayan prison inmates addressed him as 'Pujariji', and seeing his pious qualities Vinoba Bhave called him by his full name, Pandit Lokman Dikshit. Lukka was the leader of Man Singh's gang when it surrendered to Vinoba Bhave in 1960 and opened a new chapter in the history of the Valley.

Released after a long prison sentence, Pandit Lokman visited our camp at Budhara in the Chambal Valley. Some four hundred youths from all over India were attending the camp at the time. Lokman told me, 'I am not a speaker; I cannot speak to the youths.' But he agreed to answer questions and the youths were happy. Lukka sat on an elevated mound of earth and the young group sat on the ground. All kinds of questions were shot at him: Why did you become a dacoit? Where did you stay in the jungles? How did you protect yourself when it rained? And so on.

A boy sitting just in front asked, 'Panditji, how long were you in the jungles?'

Lukka replied, 'Sir, I was in the jungles for twelve years and in jail for eight years, which was no better than the jungle. So I count twenty years of my life as wasted in the jungles.'

'Eight long years in jail! You must have

killed people?’

‘Yes sir, one does not carry garlands into jungles but guns, and one has to kill at times.’

‘Twelve years of killing! How many people did you kill?’

‘Where do you live? What is your age?’

‘I live in Delhi and I am seventeen years old.’

‘Seventeen years. How many rotis have you eaten in these seventeen years?’

‘How many rotis I ate in my life? I do not make a note in my diary of how many rotis I eat. How can I tell you?’

‘Sir, living in Delhi, you do not keep count of your rotis. How do you expect me to keep count of killings in the jungle!’

Nowadays the aged Lukka lives in Bhind, Madhya Pradesh. One must meet him to see the change. So composed, so intelligent, and so friendly that one cannot believe that such a person could have ever uttered a harsh word in life, what to talk of killing people!

These are some of the human possibilities one can see in the laboratory of the Chambal Valley. The tiger ate other animals ten thousand years ago and they continue to be its food even today. But humans who were sometimes cannibals ten thousand years ago are today turning to vegetarian ways. A Jesus Christ, a Socrates, a Mahatma Gandhi smilingly gave up his own life for a cause, for the good of others. And this is the hope for humankind: *the worst of criminals can turn into the best of saints*.

The Chambal Saga

Why do well-meaning people turn into bandits in the Chambal Valley? The reason why bandits in the Chambal Valley are called *bagis* or rebels is that some eight hundred years ago, when the area was being invaded by the Thugs, Pindaris and other marauders, the local feudal lords encouraged people to arm themselves to fight these invaders. So the fighting *bagis* became heroes to the locals. The tradition continued and thus the dacoits of later years suffered no stigma for their wretched lifestyle. Their ac-

ceptability in society was so common that even when they were lodged in prisons after surrender, dozens of them got married and parents were happy to give their daughters in marriage to them!

Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation in the Chambal context involves many fronts:

1. *Land*: The area of our concern spans about 150 km in length and 100 km in width. It lies between Agra and Jhansi in north-central India. The land in this area lacks humus and so the soil erodes easily, especially in the rainy season. With every monsoon hundreds of acres of land are eroded leaving creeks five to 150 feet in depth. Various governments have made occasional efforts to reclaim the ravine land. But more fresh ravines are created than land reclaimed. Then again, when the government offered to sell the reclaimed land at prices that included the cost of reclamation, it was too expensive for common people to buy. We have tried to convince successive governments in Madhya Pradesh to change the methodology. The ravines may be allotted to landless people and they may be helped to reclaim the land. In that case the land owners will be economical in their spending and would take personal interest in keeping the land in good shape.

2. *Psyche*: Because the first *bagis* were not only encouraged but actually initiated by the then rulers, being a *bagi* was not taboo. There is a need to introduce new values into the Valley. Moneyed people in the Valley used to carry large amounts of cash when they were travelling so that whenever they were waylaid by a gang, they could readily pay and escape being kidnapped. Once the *bagis* surrendered, the moneyed people should have given some thought and begun spending all such money for public good. Instead, they only thought of themselves and spent the money in building mansions.

It is common practice in the Chambal Valley for people to buy a gun when they get a little money. The local people need to develop

the mindset of using money for building a better culture based on human values. This, in a way, is needed all over India. 2000-2010 has been declared the Decade of the Culture of Peace by the United Nations. It is a good time for all nations to introduce peace culture in their own lands.

3. *Surrendered Dacoits*: The surrender events that took place in 1960, 1972 and 1976 were such historic events in the field of non-violence that the respective governments became very enthusiastic and announced many plans. They also announced gifts to the surrendered dacoits: they would be allotted ten to twenty bighas of land, given money to begin cultivation, and their wards would receive scholarships in schools. A big source of violence had disappeared and so the governments (at the centre, and in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh) were ready to extend all facilities to the families of those who surrendered.

But once the dacoits got into prison, the promises began to slowly fade. There was no pressure from the jungles to take urgent action. The leadership also changed and in a short time the whole story was forgotten. While a few surrendered persons have been rehabilitated, many others have been left to themselves and the situation is not at all happy.

4. *Victims*: In many cases, the victims of the dacoits were police informers. The police were in touch with their families and so helped rehabilitate them. Normally the district administration is to attend to rehabilitation and, within their busy schedule, they have done what they could. It would have been ideal if the government had appointed a separate officer to look after rehabilitation. But, as noted earlier, once the dacoits were inside prisons, the government took things easy and work slowed

down.

The Post-surrender Situation

The biggest surrender event up to date was in 1972, when five hundred and eleven dacoits surrendered. After the event it was common to hear people give expression to their feelings saying, 'We do not know what happened in India in 1947, but real freedom came to us only in 1972, when all those dacoits went to prison.' At the same time, however, people did not think it necessary to change their lifestyle and embrace simpler and more peaceful attitudes. We had suggested to the government of Madhya Pradesh that they constitute 'peace committees' at village, tehsil and district levels with responsible people like teachers, doctors, social workers, and elected representatives to take care of the peace. For political reasons, however, this was not done. It is also important that honest officers be posted in the revenue and police departments.

Due to the absence of follow-up from the government and lack of public spirit among the people, unfortunately, the problem is again raising its head in the Chambal Valley. The police alone cannot bring about lasting peace. The whole society ought to take it as its responsibility. The government is ready to spend huge amounts of money to try and liquidate each gang, but they must also think of steps to prevent people from taking to wrong ways. Mahatma Gandhi's prescription of building Shanti Sena (Peace Brigade) units in villages must be encouraged.

The Chambal Valley experiment has given us one hope: A dishonest man can change into an honest citizen. The right kind of spirituality can help in this process. That is the hope for humankind. *

God has given three priceless gifts to humans: One, of speech. Animals don't have it. Let us speak the truth with love. Let us take Rama's name. Two, hands. Even monkeys have hands, but they only know how to uproot, not how to sow. Let us serve with our hands. ... God's third great gift is an empathic heart. None can be cruel for ever. God has not made anyone hard-hearted. Let us be sympathetic towards all. —Vinoba Bhave, *To the Chambal Valley*, 1960

The Criminal Mind

PROF. SOMNATH BHATTACHARYYA

The History of a Criminal

Netai was running at breakneck speed and, but for his accidental fall, would have outdistanced the pursuing policemen. He had accidentally toppled over the dead body of his brother Kanai, who could not dodge the rifle bullet fired by the police. Netai was more fortunate than Kanai—or was he?

Netai and Kanai are fraternal twins. At sixteen they were engaged—or employed—by their ringleader to break wagons. That night the yard turned into a graveyard for Kanai and Netai was caught and jailed.

Their ‘employer’ had picked the twins up from a Calcutta street about five years before this encounter. They were first taken to a brothel to work as errand boys. But the boys were strong and muscular, and were not work-shy. So they were rewarded for these ‘qualities’ with ‘outdoor’ work, the more daring ‘real jobs’.

But nobody—not even Netai and Kanai—knows why they had to loiter the streets for most part of the day. Available history tells us that their mother would not allow the boys to stay indoors for the best part of the day. The boys would be allowed in at around nine or ten at night and thrown out again the same time in the morning. The mother would give them some money, which was not enough even for a quarter meal, let alone a full meal. And when the boys picked up smoking, the leftover money would barely suffice for a bite. So they were in search of money; and their employer was on the lookout for hungry boys. That settled the deal!

The subsequent events contributed to the boys’ ultimate fate. The mother poisoned their father (who, incidentally, was a part-time thief) and fled with her paramour. The romance did

not last long. When the second husband (they were sort of married) deserted her, the mother had to do more ‘work’—for she had to earn her meals! And she had to work alone, not in front of her sons. So the boys drifted from one shelter to another until one met with his end at a railway yard and the other was lost.

Analysing Crime

Let us now examine this crime.¹ Criminal behaviour has i) a cause, ii) a style, and iii) a consequence. If we have no desire we will not do anything.² Desire has been extensively studied by psychoanalytic scholars.³ Every mind holds innumerable desires, fulfilment of many of which may even be disastrous to the individual and to society. So the mature mind learns to keep these dangerous desires in check. This is the ‘control mechanism’ of the mind.

There are two controllers of desire. One is called the ego and the other is the superego.⁴ An intelligent and logically fortified mind obeys the rules of the ego more than it obeys the rules of the superego. But both these structures are end results of learning⁵ and are therefore not foolproof.

Let us now consider criminal action-pattern or ‘style’. Antisocial Personality Disorder (ASPD), Dyssocial Personality Disorder (DPD), and psychopathy are overlapping terms in psychiatry. The nucleus of any ASPD or DPD is violence with, of course, its attendant mental states. Violence can be against the environment (these days we frequently come across such terms as ‘eco-friendly’ and ‘eco-unfriendly’); against human objects—directly, as in assault and sexual offences, or indirectly, as in theft; and against material objects, as in vandalism and criminal damage. This aggressive behaviour is called ‘acting out’ which varies enor-

mously in style, heat content and cunning.

Apart from overt acting out, there are also masked styles of crime. This includes the manipulative cunning of the con man who cheats people, usually out of money or property, by first convincing the victim of something that is untrue. Here is a case illustration:

Debapriya was a bright postgraduate student of physics at the university. He used to travel from his home in suburban Bandel to Kolkata, where he studied. During one of these trips he became friendly with a well-dressed 'saintly-looking' fellow traveller who introduced himself as Stanley. Stanley told Debapriya that he was an Anglo-Indian, a freelance travel agent, and a draughtsman. Debapriya was impressed by Stanley's 'selfless' behaviour. He would never allow Debapriya to pay for the tea they drank together. He had also, on a few occasions, given Debapriya free taxi rides to the university, especially when his train happened to be late. Stanley made Debapriya understand that he had assessed him and that with his merits Debapriya should not 'rot' in Kolkata but try for admission to some first-class college in some first-world country. Being the son of an English father (and a Bengali mother), Stanley said, he had connections in England. He even showed Debapriya a few letters from his English uncle, one Mr Glover, who had expressed his eagerness to sponsor Debapriya's study programme in the UK. As Mr Glover was a member of the governing body of an Oxford college, everything would be easy and smooth. Debapriya would only have to pay the airfare and the college registration fee, and the special fees for getting a quick passport and a super-quick UK visa. It all added up to a paltry sum—Rs 45,000. Stanley even volunteered to help Debapriya sell his mother's ornaments for ready cash. And this was done. Debapriya has never again seen Stanley since the time he took the bundle containing his mother's ornaments and vanished into thin air.

Stanley's style does not involve overt violence—but crime it indeed is! Although vio-

lence (or acting out) is a major aspect of crime, yet there can be crimes without violence. Crime is a major contravention or infraction of civic law, no matter how one does it. It is the performance of some act which is forbidden by statute and which is accompanied by social (and legal) condemnation.

Criminal style is an ever-evolving entity. As days roll on, scientific discoveries add to the sparkle of technology. Criminal masterminds avidly ingest and digest these advances, develop new styles of crime and hand them over to their handymen, the crime workers. Today's war technology cannot compare with yesterday's war techniques, today's con-man-ship is distinct from last year's style. An exhaustive description (or indexing) of style is therefore difficult. Suffice it to say that style is an ever-changing dynamic field.

The 'consequences' of an act of crime are assessed from the viewpoints of the criminal himself as well as that of the victim. The victim is the sufferer. The criminal is the gainer. But there are exceptions. Once I had a client who was a substance abuser. He needed money to buy drugs. One day he chanced upon a bundle of currency notes (amounting to nearly eighteen thousand rupees) and a few gold ornaments wrapped in a plastic sheet in a taxi. He was overjoyed. He sold the ornaments for some seven thousand rupees and with this total of twenty-five thousand started his life of crime. This episode somehow gave him the impression that intelligent thieving could provide him with the money he needed to buy substances. On one occasion he deftly lifted a box of ornaments from a passenger in a train compartment. After about a week an advertisement in a Bengali daily caught his attention. It gave the description of the tin container he had stolen on the train. The hapless owner had appealed to whosoever had 'inadvertently' taken his box of ornaments to return it to him. Those ornaments were meant for his daughter's wedding. Without that dowry the marriage would fall through; and the father was financially incapa-

ble of securing another set of ornaments. By that time my client had already sold his find and had also spent some of the money. But he somehow felt like returning whatever money remained with him and went to the advertised address. But by the time he met the owner—about a week after he had seen the advertisement—‘the worst had already happened’. I don’t know what exactly he meant by ‘the worst’ but he was in tears as he said this to me. I presume that either the marriage was lost or the daughter had committed suicide!

We frequently hear that the crime rate is increasing. This may be true; but it may also be that crimes are nowadays better reported. Whatever be the truth, the electronic media has surely grown more reckless in publishing the details of crimes. I once heard an adolescent boy telling his mother (and I was present there) that he ‘knows eighteen beautiful and perfect ways of murder’.

Psychotherapy for ASPD

Now a few words about therapy. Criminals are mentally diseased persons. The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* of psychiatric disorders records ASPD as a disease category.⁶ The major issue in psychological therapy of criminal behaviour concerns the management of the criminal mind’s tendency to act out. Acting out is the stanchion on which criminal behaviour sits tight, and this very tendency reduces the criminal’s accessibility to psychoanalysis or psychotherapy.⁷ In any form of psychological treatment there must be some interaction between the therapist and the client and this interaction should provide the client with the answers to his questions, with the clarification of his doubts and inquiries, and much more. In acting out the patient is not asking anything (he is not ready to listen to answers, either). On the contrary, in acting out it is the patient who talks (through his body language and shouts); he lets off steam and gets a defence-loaded pseudo-satisfaction. Thus acting out is anti-therapeutic.⁸

The psychodynamic view emphasizes fail-

ures of parenting in early or late childhood and youth. Inconsistency in disciplinary training can produce the criminal mind. Although consistency is extremely difficult to imbibe, yet a sincere and honest person can certainly achieve a degree of consistency (if not constancy) if he cares to understand others. From the little we know about Netai and Kanai, their parents did not know much about parenting; they did not even care.

The ASPD personality is sensitive to criticism and rejection. These individuals are continually rejected in society (which cannot be helped!) and thus become hypersensitive. This makes psychotherapy all the more difficult because quite often the therapist has to stage a graded ‘rejection drama’ for the sake of therapy itself. So the therapist must be skilled enough to formulate an instant balance between acceptance and criticism.

Shame is another critical personality characteristic of violent offenders. Shame is related to feelings of grievance, grudge and desire for revenge. A sense of shame and poor self-esteem⁹ makes the sufferer hypersensitive to humiliation. And it is on this very sensitivity that systems of criminal justice thrive. Working with shame and humiliation is a central technical problem in psychotherapy of ASPD.¹⁰

The criminal mind is unconsciously (or consciously) afraid to go back to a non-criminal existence. He thinks himself contaminated and therefore unwelcome in non-criminal society. In addition to this there is the pressure from criminal leaders and supervisors who threaten him and force him to stay back in the crime industry. This generates a ‘negative therapeutic reaction’ (NTR) and poses a stiff challenge to therapy. To meet this difficulty some therapists recommend ‘teamwork’ (ibid.). It is often felt that group psychotherapy provides a matrix of social and psychological interaction and support that is of greater benefit to the ASPD patient than the dynamic relationship of individual psychotherapy.

ASPD has its origins not *solely* in individual

psychological maldevelopment, but is embedded within, defined by and rooted in the contemporary social and political contexts. As such it presents a huge challenge—for psychotherapists certainly, but even more for policy makers and for the guardians of our socio-cultural world (ibid.). *

Notes and References

1. I have mainly followed a psychoanalytic line of argument in this essay. Other forms of thinking and explanation of criminal behaviour are also available. I have touched upon them, though somewhat loosely. But I wish to make it clear that psychoanalysis is but one view that studies the criminal mind.
2. This statement is both true and false. Action in psychology is purposive behaviour or behaviour with intent. But action in physiology can be non-purposive—an automatic, thoughtless, stimulus-response sequence, e.g. reflex withdrawal from a painful stimulus. Deep underneath the automatic, unconscious reflex, there may still be a purpose—the purpose of survival—but in the jargon of psychology this is not purpose (despite being purpose in the ultimate sense).
3. Our desires are named variously—need, wish and the like. At birth the infant's sole desire ('sovereign tendency' as Freud calls it in his metapsychology) is to have pleasure; and its pleasure comes from suckling at the mother's breast and from sleep. As the child grows older and develops, he comes to learn about other pleasures and his desires grow in quantity and complexity. This build-up of desire is positively related to one's rational intelligence as well as emotional intelligence. A person's desires and 'instincts' can be related through an equation. Although the term *instinct* is multivalent in its meaning, yet psychoanalysts have their own understanding of it. Freud conceived of instinct roughly in the form of a vector. It has a 'source' or 'impetus', an 'aim', and an 'object'. Details of his views are available in Freud's own writing. The *Standard Edition of*

the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud or one of the numerous other books on Freud may be consulted for details.

The aim of desire is satisfaction, for satisfaction of desire gives pleasure. But an individual who has learned to respect another person's desire(s) would understand that satisfaction of some of one's desires would yield more social and moral displeasure than the straightforward crude pleasure that would result from the satisfaction of the original desire. The cultured, sophisticated mind (formed as a result of learning) then generates an anti-desire that attempts to thwart the satisfaction of the original desire.

The psychoanalytic scheme is like this: whenever a desire is 'ideationally presented' (becomes known to the individual) it gets logically and morally weighted. This weighing is the function of the individual's maturity (both logico-intellectual as well as the emotional and moral maturity that comes from learning). If the individual concludes that the desire can be safely fulfilled, then he goes ahead with the fulfilment and enjoys the consequence. But if the individual comes to the conclusion that fulfilment of a desire would yield more pain (shame, loss of self-esteem and the like) than pleasure, then such a desire is either i) repressed or ii) sublimated or iii) turned into its opposite (e.g. the desire to hate a person turns into the desire to love the person) or iv) turned on to one's own self (the desire to inflict pain/discomfort/insult on an object turns into the desire to suffer). Details about these 'faces' of desire are given in Freud's metapsychological writings or in such books as Otto Fenichel's *Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis* (New York: Norton, 1972).

4. To lay people, the ego is coterminous with pride or vanity, or with arrogance, boastfulness, snobbery and the like. But to the psychoanalyst, the ego is the logical component of the personality that can be equated with intelligence and prudence. This is also the most-studied 'structure' of the mind. The ego has nearly a dozen functions. These include i) real-

ity testing, ii) judgement, iii) regulation and control of drives, affects and impulses, and iv) object relations. Interested readers may consult L Bellak's *Ego Functions in Schizophrenics, Neurotics and Normals* (John Wiley, 1972).

The superego (that by no means is 'super') has five main functions: i) the approval or disapproval of actions and wishes on moral considerations, ii) critical self-observation, iii) self-punishment, iv) demand for reparation or repentance of wrongdoing, and v) self-praise or self-love as a reward for virtuous desires, thoughts and actions. Interested readers may consult C Brenner's *Elementary Textbook of Psychoanalysis* (New York: International Universities Press, 1955).

5. One can teach only what one knows. The incorporated information or knowledge that one picks up becomes 'dear' to the person (teacher). In psychoanalytic jargon, it acquires an 'ego quality'. It is often difficult to edit or modify much of this information/knowledge. It then takes up the character of 'belief'. Thus a teacher often unknowingly passes on incorrect information/knowledge to the taught and this chain continues. There are also special occasions when a super-talent is born with the courage and conviction to challenge conventional thinking, and with the merit to identify correct knowledge. However, there is 'no one truth but an interlocking pattern of truths', as Gregory Bateson has pointed out; and it pays to remember Bateson.
6. The American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM)* has 'Personality Disorder' as one of its main chapters. Among the different personality disorders, Antisocial Personality Disorder is described thus: 'There is a pervasive pattern of disregard for and violation of the rights of others' This description is exhaustive. Interested readers

may consult *DSM-4-Revised* (New Delhi: Jaypee Brothers, 1997). The World Health Organization's *International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10)*, 1992, has also discussed this criminality.

7. Talking is the means to psychotherapy. Freud says: 'We want our clients to be absolutely candid with us.' The therapist and the client jointly try to understand the client's problems as he goes on expressing these through his free talk. In his *Critical Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* (Penguin, 1979) Charles Rycroft says that 'acting out' is an end in itself. That is, the patient acts out, feels satisfied, and calls it a day. In order to understand the reason for the hidden complexes, one must not replace thought with action. To put it differently, one must not allow oneself unbridled satisfaction. For it is only the enquiring restless mind that achieves wisdom. Acting out is anti-therapeutic.
8. Psychoanalysis is re-education (as are other forms of psychotherapy). At the beginning of therapy, the therapist teaches the client to observe and understand his maladaptive traits and then offers him a sort of a 'package' in the form of a modified ego-superego system. Erikson sums up the process beautifully when he says that in psychoanalysis 'one who has learned to overcome himself teaches the unobservant to be self-observant'. Interested readers may consult Erik H Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: Norton, 1950).
9. According to psychoanalytic theory 'self-esteem' follows from two principal sources: i) material possessions like wealth and the things money can buy; and ii) a sense of having done the correct thing. For details, see Fenichel's *Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis*.
10. Christopher Cordess et al., 'Cluster B Antisocial Disorder' in *Oxford Textbook of Psychotherapy*, eds. Glen O Gabbard et al. (Oxford, 2005).

Some Personal Determinants of Aggression: i) Type A Behaviour Pattern (high levels of competitiveness, time urgency and hostility); ii) Hostile Attributional Bias (tendency to perceive hostile intent in ambiguous actions of others); iii) Narcissism (over-inflated views about oneself).

The Cruel Teens

Youth Violence Revisited in the Light of Psychology

DR JAYANTI BASU

Meno asked Socrates: Is virtue something that can be taught (through instruction and discussion)? Or does it develop through practice? Or is it inborn? In the present article we will seek answers to these questions with special reference to teenage violence.

Quite a few times in the last two decades we—the so-called civilized people—have literally shuddered and been nauseated by gory descriptions of teenage violence in the morning papers. For trifling reasons, or for no apparent reason at all, youngsters have poisoned their parents, butchered their peers, and strangled unsuspecting innocent acquaintances. It will be a gross mistake to consider these as exceptional and isolated events, the handiwork of abnormal minds. Statistics show a clear upward trend in adolescent and children's violence, highlighting its commonness in society. The media brings to our notice only the most heinous and fatal crimes and, of course, only those that have been reported. Many remain unknown and unnoticed, attempted but unsuccessful (and subsequently suppressed), not to speak of the less fatal but chronic brutalities inflicted upon many families by their own children. The World Health Organization considers youth violence a major issue to be covered under its mental-health wing and gives it special attention.

Statistics about teen violence in India are not readily available. In the last two decades, teen violence in the United States has reached epidemic proportions. A report by the surgeon general of the USA in 2000 reveals that over half of the children in grades 6 through 12 were confident about procuring and using a hand-

gun. Since 1980, one in four murders of teenagers involved a juvenile offender. While some seem to think that juvenile crime has decreased in the new millennium, this is but a myth. Rather people in the US appear to be gradually becoming insensitive to such violence, taking it to be 'a part of life'!

Why are today's youth more aggressive, more violent? Can psychology provide some clues? Our discussion will be two-pronged, taking into account the biology and the environment of adolescents.

Limits of Aggression and Violence: Who Draws the Line?

Aggression is an instinctive impulse, natural to every living being. Our scriptures call it a *ripu* or enemy. In fact, nature has not made aggression our enemy; we have made it so by indulgence and misappropriation. Nature has provided us tools for well-judged acts of aggression; after all, aggressive impulses have been selected in the process of natural selection because they are essential aids in the struggle for existence. The snake has to hiss, or else the cowherds stone it to death. But we also have provisions for control and evaluation of propriety, a mechanism to regulate aggressive impulses. We have been provided with inbuilt *power* or *free will* to control, suppress, cultivate, enhance or judiciously use aggression. In other words, we have been bestowed with the freedom and responsibility to set our own limits on our impulses. It is not some uncontrollable inner animal that goads us to impulsive 'acting out', including violence. We abide by or violate the limits we ourselves are equipped to draw. Let us see how.

The neurochemical structure of the human organism is responsible for the genesis and regulation of aggression and violence. There is no denying the fact that there exist individual dispositional differences in aggression. This disposition is named *temperament*. Temperament is dependent on the amount and type of neurochemical substances secreted in the brain, which in turn are partly genetically determined and therefore liable to genetic variations. Some babies are temperamentally more irritable and unstable; others are stable and quiet. Spontaneous aggression is greater in the first category.

The centres for spontaneous aggression lie within two specific structures in the brain: the *amygdala* and the *limbic system*. Aggression is generated when somebody or something is perceived as harmful. As a result of this perception specific nerve cells in the amygdala and limbic system are stimulated giving rise to specific autonomic changes within the body, which we designate as the *emotion of aggression*. Such emotional arousal demands action, and for many impulsive individuals the subsequent train of violence is triggered without any further processing at the higher brain centres. The purpose of this violent response is to annihilate the perceived agency of harm. As soon as the action is successfully completed, the threat is gone, and the *normal* homeostatic equilibrium of the brain is restored. Serotonin, a neurotransmitter molecule found in the brain, plays a significant role in this process.

Spontaneous aggression and violence is, however, not the whole story. It is the end point for lower species, but not for human beings. The highly developed forebrain of the higher species contains a few centres for voluntary regulation of aggressive behaviour. These are, however, not spontaneously activated like the centres of the limbic system and amygdala. That is why they are voluntary and not instinctive. These centres in the forebrain have the potential for monitoring violence. But this capacity has to be cultivated through practice. When the limbic system and amygdala start the appar-

ently irrevocable chain of perception of harm ► arousal ► violent retributive action, the regulatory mechanism in the forebrain can be voluntarily activated through other emotions and reason. The capacity to activate these regulatory mechanisms needs to be acquired individually right from childhood through sustained practice. Hence the prolonged childhood of human beings—to provide scope for learning and training these malleable regulatory mechanisms. Hence also the significance of parenting.

The Regulation of Violence

What are the modes of regulation? What kind of stimuli activate the regulatory centres? The stimulus for spontaneous aggression often has an immediate anchorage outside the body (X is infuriated after seeing what Y has done), although aggression can be generated by a memory or just a fantasy. Even in the latter cases it is the memory of a past external event or a fantasy of an event projected into the future. Contrariwise, the regulatory mechanism operates only from within, through internalized thought and consciously altered interpretation of the course of events. One has to deliberately sever the chain of event ► perception ► aggression from within.

There are two ways to do this. One is through reason; the other is through emotions opposite to aggression. Nature has given us the large mass of cerebral cortex to enrich us with intellect and logic. It is only with the help of reason that we can understand the future consequences of aggressive action on oneself as well as on others. Unless the expression of anger is cost-effective, we can convince ourselves to ‘gulp down the anger’ and ‘accommodate’. We can also reason that the present frustration may lead to future benefit, and thus implement a ‘delay of gratification’ by tolerating the present unpleasantness in hope of future satisfaction. Nature has also given us a powerful memory system whereby we can afford to store many images and thoughts for subsequent use. We can also use these images to generate different

emotions that can oppose aggression. Some such emotions are love, forgiveness, altruism, empathy, and humour.

Therefore, humans draw their own limit to violence. They learn to draw this limit through their own experiences. Here childhood experiences in self-regulation are undoubtedly the most effective, as they lead to the formation of a tendency in the regulatory centres to operate whenever aggression comes forth in its spontaneous viciousness. However, the entire onus must not be put on childhood training alone. A strong-willed person can change himself even later in life. Ratnakara may or may not be a historical figure, but what he achieved is not mythical. He symbolizes the strength of empathy (his identification with the dead birds) accompanied by strong will power and cultivation of intellect (his penance and practice) rewarded with the attainment of unbelievable intellectual capacity.

The Teens: A Special Period of Life

It was in 1904 that Stanley Hall described adolescence as a period of storm and stress. A hundred years later, we do not necessarily think so—adolescence may be a phase of pleasure and healthy development as well. It all depends on the particular adolescent and her/his surroundings. Nevertheless, adolescence is a very special period because, in a number of ways, it involves the transition from immaturity to maturity. In the first place, intellectual function attains its highest goal of fully functional rationality in this period. Secondly, the need for mature attachments as well as the urge for autonomous activities free from adult supervision arise strongly in this phase. Thirdly, this is the period of identity development through an exploration of various aspects of life. If this search gives rise to a temporary sense of crisis, this period of fumbling and experimenting is ultimately beneficial for the growing mind.

It needs to be remembered that aggression is not directly enhanced in adolescence. But there are indirect facilitators of the aggressive

impulse. The upsurge of testosterone in the male body indirectly enhances aggressive impulses to some extent. The drop in a brain chemical called dopamine decreases the ability to feel pleasure, and the teenager needs strong stimuli to feel enjoyment. Destructive acts may serve as one such source of enjoyment for some youngsters simply because such acts are unusual and intensely emotional. However, it needs to be remembered that the same pleasure can be derived from many other activities—from any creative act, for instance. Also, it is in adolescence that the brain undergoes a second spurt in development and whatever is practised in this period gets imprinted strongly for the rest of one's life. Furthermore, adolescence is the best period for learning to use the control centres of the brain, and also the time to choose how to utilize one's excess energy in constructive tasks.

It therefore falls within the domain of parents and teachers to understand the parameters of adolescence and to pave the way for constructive use of the adolescent's biological changes and intellectual ripening.

Parent-Child Interface as a Determinant of Aggression and Violence

It does not help much for parents to simply preach 'Always speak the truth', 'Don't steal', 'Don't fight' and 'Love others'. The child will soon be exposed to instances where untruth begets success, where the more you grab the richer you become, where you are treated as weak unless you fight your way up, and where your love for others enhances your chance of being exploited. Rather, it is the duty of the parents to develop the judgemental and self-controlling faculties in the child so that in the face of the inevitable contradictions and lures of the world the child can voluntarily choose the way leading to greatest harmony for herself or himself. It is also the duty of the parents to help the child define harmony, to develop a sense of balance and stability in her/his personality, to provide her/him with the will power that s/he can utilize later to resist the unwholesome and

never-ending desire for external materials. Instead of directly and completely suppressing aggression, it is the duty of parents to cultivate judgement for appropriate aggression in the child.

It means that the parents' task is complex. It is being made more complex by the fact that nowadays it is becoming more difficult to conceal any information from children. They get all the information they seek from the media, and we must remember that the media plays a highly significant role in generating aggression and violence. Audio-visual presentation of violence in particular has been shown to enhance aggression and reduce sensitivity to others' pain. While it cannot be gainsaid that the media needs to be refined, in the present article our focus will be primarily on the role of parents.

Another source of exposure to undesirable information is the cramped living space and small families of modern days. Earlier, children had easy access to different free spaces of their own, where they could play and be oblivious of the petty disturbances at home. Now they are forced to witness the adult world with all its complications and falsifications. They are in a position to judge the difference between the preached and the practised, and learn to view their parents as deficient in human virtues. Aggressive outbursts and violence in the family directly influence their perception of the human world. Parents with children to rear need to remember these constraints.

Owing to such exposures, the child often gets to see the multiple faces of the persons s/he depends upon long before her/his judgemental capacity is developed. The child can also see that 'good' and 'great' are defined in contradictory ways. Indeed, children often find that persons closest to them often subscribe to contradictory values in accordance with some ulterior motive. So nothing is 'true' and 'stable' for the developing mind. I can recall the case of Suman, a bright young boy of fourteen from a middle-class educated family, who demanded three thousand rupees as his 'weekly allowance'.

When his father refused to give the amount, Suman beat up his mother ruthlessly, suffocated her with a pillow, forced her to hand over the key to the almirah, got hold of the money and walked off, leaving his wounded mother in a semi-conscious state. When he was brought for psychiatric therapy of his cruelty he stated that he had learnt the 'principles' from his father who, although apparently a disciplined and polite man, used to resort to unfair means for procuring money for his business. 'I must have what I need', Suman's father used to say on some critical pecuniary issues. 'I also got what I wanted; only I was more successful', Suman said with a smile.

The Stages of Moral Development

Moral development is by no means a simple process. The famous developmental psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg has described every child as a moral philosopher in her/his own way. In normal moral development every child passes through three phases: pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional. In the pre-conventional phase morality is understood in terms of reward and punishment, or in terms of power. For example, the rules laid down by the father or the king are right because they are powerful, and because if the rules are not followed the authority figures will hand out punishment. The child in this phase is usually a conformist, but for mundane practical reasons. At the conventional level maintaining social norms is understood as right for its own intrinsic value—justification takes over from blind obedience to rule. Conventional social morality regarding violation of others' rights is generally followed in this phase. In the post-conventional phase certain rules are followed as autonomous moral principles independent of conventional social dictums. Herein traditional rules may be broken in favour of some higher non-conventional principle. For example, the mundane needs of the family may be sacrificed for the call of the motherland.

Most of us—the 'normal' people—fall in

the conventional domain. Only a few reach the post-conventional stage with strength and determination. But serious lapses from even conventional morality occur for those who remain or slip into the pre-conventional level even at a mature age. Many of them end up as perpetrators of different kinds of violence. Since the criterion of pre-conventional morality is immediate need satisfaction, concrete material pleasure and pain become its sole determinants. A physically grown-up teenager with pre-conventional morality is incapable of understanding the abstract and generalized notion of pain and pleasure for all (beyond one's own selfish pleasure and pain), but can manipulate others for one's own needs. Here two factors are of great importance. One is the level of interpersonal attachment or bond with others (*the love factor*) and the other is the ability for abstraction of rules from individual to society (*the rationality factor*).

Nature v Nurture

Parents need to understand that some children are temperamentally aggressive owing to some intrinsic neurological disposition. Special care needs to be taken in bringing up such children to prevent them from becoming impulsively destructive. In childhood, many of these children are hyperactive with little ability to concentrate on anything. They are defiant and abusive, and by adolescence they become palpably cruel and fond of alcohol and drugs. They engage in various antisocial acts and become oblivious to others' pain. A large number of such children end up as criminals. This pattern is diagnosed by modern psychiatry as a specific disease: *conduct disorder*. Parents and teachers need to be trained to recognize this. Indeed, there are many children who are extremely naughty and love to disturb others; not all of them suffer from conduct disorder. We know that Sri Chaitanya and Swami Vivekananda too were very troublesome and almost unmanageable in their childhood. But what differentiates the child with conduct disorder

from 'Nimai' and 'Bile' is the lack of love and affection for others in the former. The near and dear ones around a child with conduct disorder feel that the child is self-centred and unconcerned about the feelings of others. People around Nimai and Bile were attracted by the love of their 'naughty' boy, despite his pranks.

But many other children, who are not temperamentally so disposed, also demonstrate unparalleled cruelty and antisocial trends. The environment is largely responsible for their chosen lifestyle. One major source of such behaviour has already been discussed: imitation by the growing mind of the parents' dubious moral standards and disrespect for values. In the modern age valueless existence in parents as well as children has escalated to an extent that history has never witnessed before. With the entire world turned into a big market for the rapid consumption of material goods, and the entire life a huge circus for reaching fastest to the top—both without knowing adequately why something is consumed or attained, the motto being concrete material pleasure and success being defined in terms of pulling other persons down—the breeding ground for confusion, greed and cruelty is well prepared. The developing mind, eager to find ideals to follow, is confronted with only fragmented and contradictory ideas. According to the psychoanalytical model of development, the superego—the part of the mind acting as conscience—is developed through internalization of parental ideals. The superego of children of the present era is internalizing inconsistent and self-centred parental imagos. Barring a gifted (or is it blessed?) few, it is extremely difficult for a teenager to integrate such inconsistencies in one's own mind, particularly at a juncture of life when the hormonal upheaval is generating new internal upsurges.

The Solution: Conscious Parenting

It is probably nothing but conscious parenting that can prevent the waywardness of teenagers today. We need to remember that our

time favours impulsivity; family bonds are being ripped apart for socio-economic reasons; living value systems are disintegrating all over. Parental attitude, therefore, needs to be strongly directed at three objectives. The first and foremost objective is to increase the parent-child emotional bond. The second one is to practise honest and consistent interaction with the child. The last but not the least is to exert self-control and to behave in a way which, if imitated by the child, would create a basis for her/his moral development. If such prescriptions seem to be nothing but rotten and backdated dicta, let me hasten to add that these very three preventive measures were highlighted in 2002 by the World Health Organization to train parents for preventing youth violence.

The impediments in the path of parental efforts are many. Most of the schools these days exert excessive pressure on the students and emphasize success by any means while paying only lip service to the development of human qualities. It is often assumed by school authorities that the development of character is the family's concern, and that the school has the right to coax the family to comply with their often arbitrary 'academic' demands. Many parents succumb to the pressure despite realizing the harm embedded in the process. Secondly, the media—by highlighting violence and upholding the power ingrained in violent interactions in their presentations—desensitize the young

minds against violence and even promote the baser aspects of the mind. Indeed, it has been proved experimentally that immediately after witnessing on-screen violence, a person can engage in greater cruelty than before the viewing. In the audio-visual media sexuality and violence are often so mixed up that the child identifies with both of these as an inseparable duo, thus unknowingly falling prey to distorted character formation.

Ideally, schools should be more concerned with character development; and the media should ideally be more responsible. But for all practical purposes, change for the better in the system is a much slower process, and is tied up with pecuniary obligations and demands that are controlled at a global level far beyond our manipulative capacity. Therefore, ultimately, whether one likes it or not, the onus falls on the parents. It is the parents who need to be conscious about the possibilities of youth violence—something that would be most excruciating for the parents themselves if allowed to materialize. There is no alternative to individual conscious value orientation to prevent such violence.

Coming back to Meno's question, virtue (or vice) originates from all three sources—genes, practice and rationality. It is only the value awareness of rearing parents that can probably save the youth. *

Conscious Parenting: There was freedom for us to do everything, except to tell a lie. If any of my brothers spoke an untruth, my parents would fast for one day. They did not beat us, they did not trouble us, but they just asked: 'Why did you feel like doing this? ... If you tell a lie it means we are responsible for your lie. There is something lacking in our way of explaining to you.' ...

On one occasion, I was speaking with mother and expressing my wish to study in Varanasi and not Nagpur. Mother said: 'Why go so far away? Nagpur is only four hours away. Why not go there instead of Varanasi?' And I replied, 'You are not educated, so how will you understand the difference between studying in Nagpur and Varanasi. ...' Father overheard me and said, 'Vimal, touch your mother's feet and ask forgiveness.' I did that. He then asked, '... Why did you insult your mother? She has not gone to school, you know that. Why could you not explain to her the difference between studying in Varanasi and Nagpur? If you cannot do that much, what is the advantage of your studying higher?'

—Vimala Thakar

Drugs and Criminal Behaviour

DR UDAY CHAUDHURI AND DR ANIRBAN BASU

It has repeatedly been noted by social scientists that addictive drugs and alcohol are closely interlinked with criminal behaviour in a complex cause-effect relationship. Classical Indian scriptures divide human temperament into three basic categories: sattvic, rajasic and tamasic. Alcoholism, drug addiction and criminal behaviour are identified as hallmarks of the third category, *tamas*, where animal instinct or the 'lower self' dominates over divine instinct or the 'higher self'. In practice too, we get to see the connections that this theory proposes. Somehow alcohol and drugs submerge the divinity in man, who can then behave as cruelly as any animal, and a vicious cycle of drug intake and criminality is ultimately set up. Let us cite two examples from our clinical experience.

Case 1: This real-life story was brought to our attention by one of our medical colleagues. One evening, when he was returning home from his office, the driver ran over a street dog. The kind-hearted doctor was in pain and scolded the driver for not driving carefully. The driver, aged around forty, a married and reasonably educated man, replied nonchalantly that once he had run over a man too. 'My God! How did you do it?' the doctor literally screamed. 'I used to drive for a businessman at that time', said the driver, rather casually. 'One night my employer was returning from a party. He was badly drunk, and so was I. It was a dark night and I was driving at high speed. Under the influence of spirit, I felt as if I could conquer the world. Suddenly I saw an old man crossing the road. He was moving slowly, probably because of his age. I pressed the horn but he could not get out of the way fast enough. I just crushed him under the wheels.' 'What happened then?' asked the doctor, terribly shocked by now. 'My employer asked me to drive faster. I dropped

him home, put the car in the garage, and then went back to my house, as if nothing had happened. I still remember, that night also I quarrelled with my wife over the menu for dinner. When I was alone I thought about the old man, but truly speaking, I never felt sorry. It was his destiny, wasn't it?'

Thus two human beings, with their careless attitude reinforced by alcohol, sent a fellow human being to his 'destiny', untimely and cruelly, without even a tinge of remorse.

Case 2: This case history is Abhishek's (real name withheld). He is twenty-two, a bright and handsome boy from a well-off business family. He was not only good at his studies but was also a brilliant debater and a talented sportsman. After passing out of school with flying colours he got admitted to a prestigious engineering college in Bangalore. He chose to stay in a rented house instead of the college hostel. Soon his house turned into a meeting place for his friends, many of whom were addicted to alcohol, marijuana, heroin, sleeping pills, cough syrup and even glue-sniffing. Abhishek soon picked up their habits and started consuming heavy amounts of substances, as cost was no bar for him. Whenever his parents inquired about his studies, he used to paint a rosy picture for them. They were assured and allowed him to have whatever money he demanded. After about a year and a half, they were tremendously shocked when they got a call from the college authorities informing them that their son had been arrested by the police and had simultaneously been rusticated from college for committing two serious offences. Abhishek had been charged with molestation of a female student of the same college who happened to be in love with him. He had also snatched away some gold and diamond ornaments from the girl to

procure money for drugs. When the parents reached Bangalore, they came to know that the boy had been selling off valuables from his house, beating up servants, depriving them of their salary and sometimes stealing valuables from his friends and neighbours for quite a long time. He had failed his second semester examination as well. The parents had to give a lot of money as compensation to the girl and her family so that they ultimately withdrew the complaint against Abhishek. The boy was taken back to his hometown and admitted to a psychiatric institution.

Abhishek's case history provides a vivid example of the damage caused by psychoactive substances to one's conduct and character. Another notable feature of this case is that Abhishek's parents were very particular about nurturing his academic and extra-curricular skills but were probably not much concerned about the development of his value system. They provided him anything and everything he wanted. He never learnt where to stop.

This leads us to a burning question: Why is today's younger generation attracted more and more towards drugs and criminality?

The Pathology of Consumerism

Parents are the child's first teachers. The first lessons in human values are given to the child by its parents. Children are fond of imitation. They imitate their parents' behaviour pattern knowingly or unknowingly. Unfortunately, today's parents are proving to be miserable failures as far as teaching traditional human values like honesty, truthfulness and fellow feeling to their children is concerned. Joint families are breaking down. Even within nuclear families marital discord and divorce are much more common nowadays. When the tie of love is absent in the family itself, how will a child learn to love its fellow human beings? Today's parents expect their child to be 'first' in all fields, but they do not pay any importance to the means they are adopting. In this era of consumerism children are also inclined to pursue an acquisi-

tive lifestyle and they are thus involving themselves in a morbid rat race right from early childhood. The unfair way is often the easier one. When achieving a goal becomes all-important, it is not surprising that children are attracted more to unfair means. This behaviour is often reinforced by some material gain and thus, very slowly, they start treading a path counter to traditional human values in their quest for greater achievement. The ultimate result is criminal behaviour.

From Consumerism to Addiction

The increasing use of drugs by the younger generation is probably another outcome of the same social pathology. When one cannot find natural pleasure in life, the youth try to get it through morbid means. In today's fast-paced life, children have little time for play. They are trained to cultivate rivalry, not friendship. It is small wonder that they should try to find relief from this suffocating life in the transient euphoria caused by drugs and alcohol. The costlier drugs like opioids and amphetamines have even become status symbols in affluent society. Unfortunately, the role played by the electronic media in generating awareness regarding these issues is often far from ideal.

The Therapy for Addiction

If an adolescent or adult becomes dependent on alcohol or drugs, he/she must be treated medically to get him/her out of the harmful habit. The first step is detoxification. This is the process of withdrawing an individual from a specific psychoactive substance in a safe and effective manner. It can be done in an in-patient or out-patient setting. Detoxification is the beginning of the treatment of substance abuse and aims at sustained abstinence from alcohol and drugs. When one suddenly stops or reduces the amount of intake of alcohol or drugs, one experiences physical symptoms like insomnia, anxiety, irritability, body ache and the like—which are known as 'withdrawal symptoms'—along with an irresistible urge to take the drug/alcohol

again. To overcome these two problems, the person must be very strongly motivated in the first place. The doctor can help with some medicines that reduce the intensity of withdrawal symptoms, which usually subside within two weeks. There may occasionally be complicated withdrawal symptoms like convulsions, delirium and psychiatric disturbances, which can prove serious. These are fortunately rare but need to be detected early and treated adequately. Should these complications occur, the patient must be kept in an in-patient setting under the close observation of a medical team comprising a psychiatrist, a physician, a psychologist, nursing staff and caregivers. In this context we need to record an important warning. Some dishonest pharmacists and practitioners advertise medicines that can be mixed with food to stop one's habit of alcohol or drug intake. But this should never be done as these medicines can give rise to life-threatening side effects if taken together with alcohol. It is also worth remembering that for any treatment the patient's motivation and informed consent are most essential.

After detoxification, prevention of relapse is the next target of treatment. There are some medicines which reduce the urge for drugs and alcohol. These need to be taken under strict medical supervision. There are also support groups, like Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA), who work on the principles of group therapy and motivate group members to achieve a philosophically correct and positive lifestyle. They have their branches in all big cities and many small towns in India. They charge no fees for their work and the only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking or quit drugs. They are apolitical, secular and self-supporting. AA and NA are playing an appreciable role to help people seeking freedom from alcohol and drug use.

The final question is how to protect the younger generation from going astray. Inclusion of value education in the curriculum is a must. Parents should be more careful about

their own behaviour and their teachings to their children. Human values cannot be learnt theoretically; they are actually copied from parents, teachers and peers. So it is the duty of elders to maintain values in their own lives. The media should also play a responsible role in this regard.

The Spiritual Solution

There is another query of relevance here: 'Does spirituality help in reducing drug use and criminal behaviour?' As we have noted at the beginning of this article, Indian philosophy categorizes human instincts into three groups, ranging from the divine to the brute. It is the basic principle of any religion to help its followers transcend their animal instincts and manifest divinity or, in other words, move from one's lower to higher self. Animals lack the power of introspection, which is a human privilege. So animals are satisfied only with the satiation of their senses. They never bother about how this fulfilment is brought about. Man is superior, because he can think about the 'ways' in terms of morality and immorality. Leading an ethically perfect life can take one closer to divinity. To humans purity can give a greater sense of fulfilment than mere material achievement. Religion teaches a man to search for his real self, the self which is a part of Paramatman, the Cosmic Self, and hence beyond material needs and instincts. When an individual can discover the endless source of joy hidden within oneself, there can be no question of being offensive or cruel to others or searching for temporary pleasure in drugs and alcohol. We remember Swami Vivekananda's exhortation on practical Vedanta: The goal is to conquer the lower self.

Can we change society this way? It is undoubtedly difficult, but not impossible. The notorious criminal Ratnakara was transformed into the great sage Valmiki, and wrote the Ramayana, through spiritual means alone. Such transformation can happen in anybody's life, if only they strive for it seriously. It is never too late. *

Life Enhancement

SWAMI BRAHMESHANANDA

The phrase *life enhancement* is a recent one and though it apparently conveys the idea of prolongation of life, the modern Western concept actually emphasizes the enhancement of the quality of life. However, the enhancement of the duration of life must also be included because one of the four aims, or rather the first and most important of the four aims of the medical profession, is the preservation of life and prevention of death.

Enhancement of the Duration of Life

The survival instinct is the basic instinct of all living creatures. None wants to die and none can imagine oneself as non-existent. Ever since the dawn of history, humankind has been struggling to find ways and means of becoming immortal, through some sort of elixir of life, ambrosia or amrita. Such attempts have been depicted in the mythologies of all countries and cultures. In India, for example, there are stories of asuras or demons, like Hiranyakashipu and Ravana, who performed severe austerities to get the boon of immortality, but ultimately landed up with choosing only the conditions for their deaths.

Yet, in Indian mythology, there is a mention of eight persons who are *chiranjivis*, those who are ever living, in their original bodies. They are Ashwatthama, Bali, Vyasa, Hanuman, Vibhishana, Kripacharya, Parashurama, and Markandeya. And it is said that one who remembers these eight eternal beings daily will live for a hundred years without disease.

However, an eternal life, an ability to live without the shadow of death, need not be an unadulterated boon. Of the eight persons mentioned above, it is believed that Ashwatthama is still living with a painful open wound on his forehead which emits a foul smell. Alas, poor

Ashwatthama, being one of the immortals, cannot die! Death, the great deliverer, is denied to him, and he is cursed to everlasting pain and suffering.

In modern times also attempts are being made to prolong life by manipulating chromosomal telomeres, which decide how many times a cell can divide. These characteristics are species-specific and have a relation with the age of that species. If this function can be artificially controlled, people might live longer. Some say that by 2025 scientists will be able to prolong the life of human beings up to 150 years and by 2050, up to 200 years.

The second aim of the medical profession is alleviation of suffering, and at times one is obliged to choose between the two aims, preservation of life and alleviation of suffering. Hence, enhancement of the duration of life cannot be an absolute, unqualified goal of life. What we want is enhancement of a useful, happy, peaceful life, rather than that of a painful life, which is as much a burden on society as it is to the individual.

Ethical questions arise while making use of medical means to prolong a painful and useless life. In such cases the socio-psychological importance of the suffering person and his desire to survive must be taken into consideration. Sometimes the very presence of an aged, dependant and invalid grandparent may be a source of great strength and stability for the whole family. Such a life is worth prolonging. A venerable sage lying paralyzed and unable even to speak may still be a source of spiritual benediction for hundreds of devotees.

At the other extreme are cases of unnecessary spending of large amounts of money and resources on terminal care when no reasonable expectation of a useful life is possible. One

study showed that no less than \$35 billion (about 17% of all health expenditure in the US) was spent on the care of the terminally ill. According to another, more than a quarter of all health expenditure is spent on those in the last year of life. In England and Wales in 1984, 23% of non-psychiatric beds were occupied by patients who died before discharge. There can hardly be a more terrible reflection on the futility and indulgence of modern medicine than this; of our roles as physicians to struggle so pointlessly, so cleverly, and so expensively to keep people alive; and of our roles as patients to refuse to accept that ultimately we too must die. In our determination to grasp a few more days or even hours of life, we use resources that are badly needed elsewhere.¹

Indian culture teaches not only an ideal way of life but also the ideal manner of death. In fact, a devout person in India prepares throughout life for an ideal, peaceful death as described in the scriptures.

Traditionally monastic communities in India do not encourage medical intervention in the process of life and death. During illness minimal intervention is sought and a monk prefers to forbear pain and suffering as part of penance and surrender to the will of God. So also is death accepted as a welcome deliverer of the soul from its imprisonment in the human body. Many monks are known to patiently forbear intense and prolonged pain of diseases like cancer without taking analgesics and without wishing for an early death. This religious approach of a monk towards life and death has also influenced society at large and many lay people too adopt a similar attitude towards them.

Voluntary termination of life by fasting or by other scripturally prescribed means is allowed for Hindu and Jain monks under certain conditions. Under normal conditions it is undertaken if there is a terminal or incurable illness or in old age when the body has lost all its usefulness. For all those who are not ready to face death so heroically as described above,

medical intervention should be sought to ensure as painless a death as possible.

The question of euthanasia is far more complicated and debatable and has many ethical and legal problems attached to it.

On the philosophical side, the concept of enhancement of life, its duration or quality, takes for granted that life alone is desirable and death undesirable. But life and death are both great facts of existence and equally important. And while we attempt an enhancement of life, we must also learn to accept death. This has been the teaching of the Bhagavadgita and all other scriptures. Atman alone abides, and both life and death are mere phases.

Enhancement of the Quality of Life

This brings us to the second part of the subject: enhancement of the quality of life. Here there is one major difficulty. We have a clear definition of health but not of life enhancement. This is evident from the type of material found on the Internet under the head 'life enhancement'.

With the increase in the duration of life, in the future we shall have a larger population of senior citizens, and one of the major future challenges will be to enhance the quality of life of such old people especially in a society of nuclear families where joint families have broken down. In modern times there are well-run senior citizens' homes in the West and in India too. In the future many more such homes will be required. Again, in places like Chandigarh, where senior citizens abound, they have many associations and many of these old persons lead a very useful, socially active life. Geriatrics has become a very specialized branch of medicine and its future is bright. Religion and religious practices can play a major role in the life enhancement of senior citizens. But it must be remembered that if the youth is spent in frivolous pursuits, it becomes difficult to regulate life or to turn to religion in old age. One must therefore prepare for old age from youth itself.

It must also be remembered that life en-

hancement will mean different things for developing countries and developed countries. For the former, it means food security, primary health care, employment, education and social security. In the Western context it has come to mean alternative systems of therapy like massage therapy, acupuncture, bio-feedback, homeopathy, energy-based systems of health maintenance, acupressure, hypnosis and self-hypnosis, colour and sound healing, naturopathy, aroma therapy, etc. Certain institutions organize week-long life-enhancement programmes for in-depth experience and guidance in significant lifestyle changes—learning to strike a balance between physical activity and private time, self-discovery (as they call it), preventive and supportive care, and development of positive lifestyle habits. Then there are cognitive-enhancement drugs too. In short, in the West life enhancement means a holistic way of life and alternative therapies plus something more.

Looked at in this light, all traditional lifestyles and all religious systems are techniques of life enhancement, having programmes for a balanced and harmonious physical, mental, and spiritual development of the individual, as well as social adjustments. They have the advantage of centuries of experience. Also there is a clear vision of the goal of life enhancement. They project an ideal human being—called *jivanmukta*, *sthitaprajna* or *gunatita*—as the aim of all life-enhancement techniques and programmes. It is doubtful whether the modern life-enhancement programmes have a clear vision of what they wish to achieve that is comparable to the vision provided by the traditional systems.

Thus, in the future there will be a number of life-enhancement packages on the market for one to choose from. What we can do is learn from our own traditions and modify that knowledge to suit future needs.

The Means to Life Enhancement

We can discuss the means of life enhance-

ment in general under physical, mental, social and spiritual enhancement. The means of physical enhancement of life are balanced diet, exercise (including pranayama and asanas), and rest and sleep.

Mental enhancement of life must have two aims: i) healthy individual reaction to external or internal stress situations, and ii) harmonious working of the various faculties of the individual: emotions and sentiments, desires and drives, and the intellect—in short, between thinking, feeling, and willing. Such an ideal mental enhancement can be achieved by what I call the four D's: discrimination, detachment, devotion, and discipline.

Discrimination includes reasoning, observation, critical assessment of an event or object, and analytical study. Practice of philosophical discrimination between the real and the unreal, and careful and critical analysis of our own real nature and that of the world around can lead to insight into the true nature of our own Self (Atman) and, like Ramana Maharshi, we can get fully establish in the Self. We will then be *svastha*, which is the real meaning of the term *healthy*. Even short of this highest state, we can make good use of our discriminating faculty and get at the depth of the events of life.

Next comes detachment. One of the major causes of mental instability and suffering is attachment to persons, places, things, and specific types of activity. When our expectations are frustrated, we get upset and lose our mental poise. This is one of the major causes of stress and is going to increase in the future. We must practise detachment and learn to be more objective in our approach, not only towards the events of the external world, but also towards the events occurring in our mental world.

Devotion integrates, strengthens, and sublimates emotions. We have hundreds of emotions which drive us in different directions. Devotion to God, to one's guru, to the scriptures, or even to an ideal is a great stabilizing force. Faith and dedication are two of its many aspects. One of the causes of failing mental

health among people is the gradual decline and weakening of faith. The postmodern world dominated by science and technology is a world of weak faith and consequent emotional instability. If one does not like to have faith and devotion for a deity, one may have them for an idea, a principle. As a matter of fact, psychologically speaking, faith in God or in a prophet ultimately boils down to faith in some worthwhile ideal.

Finally, there must be discipline in all its aspects. The body must be disciplined, the senses must be controlled and must obey the commands of the mind, and the mind too must be disciplined. Just as a chariot with disciplined and controlled horses, with the reins held tight in the hands of an expert driver reaches the goal safely without meeting with accidents, so also a disciplined body with controlled senses, mind and intellect conduces to the overall well-being of an individual. The eightfold path of yoga with meditation as the central theme is essentially a scheme of all-round life enhancement.

Just as we need physical rest and sleep, we need mental rest, recreation and relaxation for the enhancement of mental life. Unfortunately in modern times, which indicate the future state of affairs, many people are not able to relax or get over their worries and anxieties. So they resort to sleeping pills and alcohol which make matters worse. Music has great recreational and relaxing value. Devotional music is elevating too. Rhythmic chanting of a mantra has a similar effect.

A major cause of mental ill-health is our faulty reaction to persons in situations which are often tarnished with envy, anger, jealousy, or hatred. This must be avoided by cultivating a feeling of friendship towards the happy and prosperous, compassion towards those who suffer, positive joy towards the virtuous, and indifference towards the wicked. This fourfold mental attitude is called *chatur-bhavana* and

conduces to the enhancement of the social dimension of life. Service and charity are two other means.

No life enhancement can be complete without the enhancement of its social dimension. It is true that individual life enhancement can and does contribute in a general way to social enhancement, but it is also equally true that social enhancement adds to individual enhancement. There are various techniques of social enhancement. One may pray for the well-being of all, or one may individually or collectively help others. Swami Vivekananda has advised us to serve others regarding them as God. And it is equally important to practise the basic moral values of not injuring anyone, not cheating others, not speaking untruth, not stealing, and not hoarding.

Finally, spiritual enhancement. We have a number of sterling examples of short but great, illuminating, and useful lives. Shankracharya lived for only 32 years, Jesus Christ for 33 years, Swami Vivekananda for 39 years, and Sri Ramakrishna for 50 years. However, they were men of tremendous character and spiritual attainments who changed the very course of history and are still influencing the world. We consider them prophets and incarnations. There have been, and are, lesser saints also in all religions and countries who have demonstrated the spiritual enhancement of life. Yet the fact remains that not many have ever been seriously interested in spiritual life enhancement. This will be the case in the future as well even if it were known and demonstrated that spiritual enhancement is infinitely more beneficial than physical or intellectual enhancement. *

Reference

1. M H King and C M Elliott, 'The Diseases of Gods: Some Newer Threats to Health' in *Oxford Textbook of Medicine*, 3rd edition, 38.

Ramakrishna: His Name and the Science of Japa

SWAMI CHETANANANDA

Ramakrishna is a wonder in the religious world. Every day innumerable people worldwide chant his name. Some are repeating his name as japa; full of joy, some are talking and hearing about him; and some are trying to know the person behind that name. Romain Rolland concluded *The Life of Ramakrishna* with this beautiful statement: 'The man himself was no more. His spirit had departed to travel along the path of collective life in the veins of humanity.'¹

Ramakrishna abhorred name and fame and was reluctant to preach about himself. He was happy just leading his divine life. Manomohan Mitra, an eyewitness, said: 'One day the Master was talking to the devotees under the Panchavati. Meanwhile, Keshab Sen arrived with some of his Brahmo followers. After various discussions, Keshab said to the Master: "Sir, if you permit, I want to make your message known to the public. It will definitely benefit people and bring peace to the world." Ramakrishna replied in an ecstatic mood: "It is not the right time to spread the message of this place [meaning his message] through lecturing and newspapers. The power and ideas that are within this body will automatically spread all over in the course of time. Hundreds of Himalayas will not be able to suppress that power."'²

Ramakrishna is an immortal and unfading flower, full of beauty, colour, fragrance, and nectar. People from remote places rushed to the temple garden of Dakshineswar to sip the nectar that was Ramakrishna. Ashwini Datta recorded his own experience: 'What I saw and received in those few days [with the Master] has sweetened my whole life. That Elysian smile of his, laden with nectar, I have locked up in the secret closet of my memory. A thrill of joy passes through my heart when I think how a

grain of the bliss shed from that laughter has been sweetening the lives of millions, even in distant America.'³

Drinking the nectar-like words of the Master, M, the recorder of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, was absorbed in bliss. With great love and enthusiasm, M distributed the Master's teachings among the devotees. His devotion for Sri Ramakrishna was so great that it spread to those who heard him speak. In an inspired mood, M tried to describe his Master. He said:

'The Master was like a five-year-old boy always running to meet his Mother.'

'The Master was like a beautiful flower whose nature was to bloom and spread its fragrance.'

'The Master was like a bonfire from which other lamps were lighted.'

'The Master was like a celestial vina always absorbed in singing the glory of the Divine Mother.'

'The Master was like a big fish joyfully swimming in calm, clear, blue waters, the Ocean of Satchidananda.'

'The Master was like a bird that had lost its nest in a storm and then, perched on the threshold of the Infinite, was joyfully moving between the two realms, singing the glory of the Infinite.'⁴

The Meaning of Ramakrishna's Name

There is an eternal relationship between a sound and its meaning. The meaning is of two kinds: the literal meaning and its inner significance. The word *Ramakrishna* literally refers to an embodied man of that name, a son of Kshudiram and Chandramani, a temple priest of Dakshineswar, and so on. The inner significance of the word *Ramakrishna* is that this be-

ing is Satchidananda, ever-free God, and an avatara. When one repeats this mantra and understands its meaning, one experiences the power of the name and joy inside.

Swami Bhagavatananda, a famous and learned monk of Varanasi, explained the profound meaning within Ramakrishna's name. He says:

From the ordinary standpoint, *Ramakrishna* is a mere name; but if one explores deeply, one will find that it is full of mystery. For example: *Ramante yoginah asmin iti rāmaḥ* [He who bestows delight upon the yogis is Rama]; *Karṣati bhaktānām duḥkham pāpaṁ mano veti kṛṣṇaḥ* [He who absorbs and destroys the sin and suffering of the devotees, or He who attracts the devotees' minds and dissolves them in His devotion, is Krishna]. Rama and Krishna were born in their respective ages to remove the sufferings of humanity. At present, they have been manifested jointly in the form of Ramakrishna.

There is mystery in the name *Rama*. When Rama was born, his father, Dasharatha, asked the sage Vasishtha to name his son. Vasishtha said, 'The name of this child is Rama.' King Dasharatha and his ministers said: 'That is a very short name. This child will inherit the throne, so he should have a long, dignified name.' Vasishtha said: 'O King, you do not know the glory and greatness of the name *Rama*. Please listen: The letter *ra* of the name *Rama* comes from the mantra *Namo nārāyaṇāya*, which is the essence of the famous Vaishnava mantra. If you remove *ra* from that mantra, it becomes *Namo nāyanāya*, which means "salutations to the sensual objects of the world" instead of "salutations to Lord Narayana". Similarly, the letter *ma* of the name *Rama* is the quintessence of the Shiva mantra *Namaḥ śivāya*. If *ma* is removed from this mantra, it becomes *Na śivāya*, which means "everything is inauspicious" instead of "salutations to the all-auspicious Shiva". When Vasishtha thus unveiled the mystery of the name *Rama*, Dasharatha was pleased. *Rama* is in the name *Ramakrishna*.

The spiritual meaning of the name *Krishna* is this: The root meaning of the word *kṛṣ* is 'ever-existent Brahman', and *na* is 'happiness' or 'bliss'. This *sat*, or existence, and *ananda*, or bliss, are the essence of Brahman. That is the

meaning of the word *Krishna*. If *sat* is removed from Brahman, nothing can exist; and if *ananda* is removed, we will not seek anything in this world. So the meaning of the word *Krishna* is *sat* and *ananda*. *Krishna* is also included in the name *Ramakrishna*. The greatness of this name is beyond description.⁵

Those who are initiated repeat the name of their Chosen Deity, so it is important for them to know the inner meaning of that name. It helps the aspirant to be close to God. We try to unite with God through karma, prayer, japa, and meditation. Our spiritual practices become smooth and joyful if we have clear knowledge of His real nature. Two days before his passing away, Ramakrishna said to Vivekananda: 'He who was born as Rama and Krishna is now living in this very body as Ramakrishna—not from the standpoint of your Vedanta, but actually so.'

Swami Turiyananda commented on the above statement:

The point stressed here is that the Advaita school of Vedanta holds jiva and Brahman to be one. Some take this to mean that everyone is equal to Rama and Krishna, and that they [Rama and Krishna] have no distinctive qualities. Lest Swamiji misunderstand the saying, 'He who was Rama and Krishna is now Ramakrishna in this body,' Sri Ramakrishna qualified this statement with the words, 'not from the standpoint of your Vedanta.' That is to say, the consciousness of Sri Ramakrishna was the consciousness of Ishvara [God] and not of the jiva. According to Advaita Vedanta, the jiva can attain the knowledge of his or her identity with Brahman by removing his or her ignorance through spiritual practices culminating in samadhi. Yet, despite all imaginable efforts, the jiva can never become Ishvara. The One who is Ishvara is eternally the Ishvara. Even when Ishvara assumes a human body and appears to be a jiva, that One remains the same Ishvara and does not become the jiva.⁶

Name and Form

According to Vedanta philosophy: Brahman is *asti-bhāti-priya* (existence, consciousness, and bliss) and the world is *nāma-rūpa*

(name and form). Brahman alone is real; It exists in the past, present, and future. The world is made of name and form and has no absolute reality. It is visible just as a mirage is visible but in fact does not exist. If that is true, then one may say that because Rama, Krishna, Ramakrishna, Shiva, and Kali have names and forms, they must not be real. So is it meaningless to follow them? We see in Ramakrishna's life that to attain nirvikalpa samadhi, he cut the form of the Divine Mother Kali in two with the sword of knowledge.

The Vedanta scriptures say that it is true that name and form do not have absolute reality; however, they have an apparent and pragmatic reality. From the absolute standpoint, the guru, the disciple, the mantra, and ignorance itself are not real; they do not really exist. But the unreal guru through an unreal mantra can remove the unreal ignorance of the unreal disciple. Similarly, an unreal doctor uses unreal medicine to remove the unreal disease of the unreal patient. In fact, Brahman alone exists and It has become everything. As a snake It bites, and as a doctor It cures. This is Its play.

Name and form cannot exist without Brahman. It is Brahman that has become manifest as beings and the universe through space, time, and causation. The non-dualist says: 'All this is verily Brahman'; 'All this—whatever exists in this changing universe—is covered by the Lord.' The dualist says: 'Wherever my eyes fall, there Krishna manifests.'

We live in the domain of name and form, which is maya. We must cling to the name and form that will help us to transcend the realm of maya: Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Jesus, Ramakrishna, and other avatars are the means by which we can reach Brahman, which is devoid of name and form. Krishna says in the Gita: 'Verily, this divine maya of Mine, consisting of the gunas, is hard to overcome. But those who take refuge in Me alone shall cross over this maya' (7.14). According to the *Amritabindu Upanishad*, the Sound-Brahman is lower knowledge; after becoming an adept in this

lower knowledge, one attains the Supreme Brahman. Swami Shivananda wrote: 'If a man repeats Ramakrishna's name and meditates on his form, he can reach Ramakrishna's peaceful abode, which is beyond name and form.'⁷

Name and Form Are Identical

Ramakrishna said, 'The name and the person named are identical.' This statement is very important from a philosophical standpoint. The word and its meaning are always connected; so the name and the person who bears it cannot be separated. Name first manifests as Om, the Sound-Brahman. This is the first vibration of creation. Name, or sound, is indestructible; sound evolves and dissolves like the waves of the ocean. Name makes the Nameless visible. Swami Brahmananda said: 'Have firm faith in God and in His name. Unite God with His name. God dwells in the hearts of devotees as the mantra. ... Repeat God's name and listen to His praise. God and the name of God are identical. If you get involved in this world without repeating His name, you will be lost in a maze.'⁸

When we utter a man's name, his face manifests in our minds. When we call on Rama, it is not Shyama who responds. Likewise, if we call upon a particular deity, he or she responds. Of course, one must call on the deity wholeheartedly:

A man sleeping in a room behind closed doors wakes up if anybody knocks and calls out his name, and responds by opening the door. In the same way, if anyone takes the name of God repeating His holy mantra, and performs spiritual practices with simple faith and zealous devotion, the Lord who dwells in all beings awakens and opens the door to the temple in the aspirant's heart. He fulfils the aspirant's cherished desire and reveals Himself in the form of the Chosen Deity.⁹

The devotional scriptures have glorified the greatness of God's name. According to the *Chaitanya Charitamrita*: 'Chant Krishna's name with steadfast devotion because the Lord

responds when He is called. Chaitanya joyfully said to Swarup and Ramananda Ray that singing the Lord's name is the supreme means to God-realization in this Kaliyuga.' Once a goswami said to Ramakrishna: 'Sir, the chanting of God's name is enough. The scriptures emphasize the sanctity of God's name for the Kaliyuga.' Ramakrishna replied: 'Yes, there is no doubt about the sanctity of God's name. But can a mere name achieve anything, without the yearning love of the devotee behind it? One should feel great restlessness of soul for the vision of God. Suppose a man repeats the name of God mechanically, while his mind is absorbed in "woman and gold". Can he achieve anything?'¹⁰

Some say: We are ordinary human beings. We have not seen God. We do not know His real nature, or even where He lives. How can we contact Him? The sage Patanjali answers: Devotion to God leads to divine union, or samadhi. 'The word that manifests God is Om.' 'The repetition of this [Om] and meditating on its meaning [is the way].' The scriptures say: 'Without making the mantra conscious, if a man repeats it a million times, he will not get the result.' It will be the mere repetition of a word.

Sadhana Awakens the Mantra

Many people in this world repeat the name of Rama, Krishna, Kali, Jesus, Allah, Ramakrishna, and other deities. One should strictly follow the guru's instructions and practise japa and meditation. After receiving initiation, some think that it is enough to repeat the mantra a fixed number of times.

The Tantric scriptures prescribe many sadhanas to make the mantra conscious. Ramakrishna and his disciples practised those disciplines. While worshipping the Divine Mother, Ramakrishna would draw a line round himself while uttering the mantra *ram*, and as he did so he would see a wall of fire surrounding him, protecting him. Swami Vivekananda would see the mantra written in golden letters. We, how-

ever, see darkness when we close our eyes to repeat the mantra and meditate. Sometimes we feel depressed. If one wants a taste of spirituality, one should first learn from the guru how to awaken the mantra, and then faithfully practise the instructions given.

Swami Vivekananda says about awakening the mantra:

The Mantra-Shāstris [upholders of the mantra theory] believe that some words have been handed down through a succession of teachers and disciples, and [that] the mere utterance of them will lead to some form of realisation. There are two different meanings of the word Mantra-chaitanya. According to some, if you practise the repetition of a certain Mantra, you will see the Ishta-Devatā who is the object or deity of that Mantra. But according to others, the word means that if you practise the repetition of a certain Mantra received from a Guru [who is] not competent, you will have to perform certain ceremonies by which that Mantra will become Chetana or living, and then its repetition will be successful. Different Mantras, when they are thus 'living', show different signs, but the general sign is that one will be able to repeat it for a long time without feeling any strain and that his mind will very soon be concentrated.¹¹

There are many ways to awaken the mantra. All mantras are a combination of letters. The combined letters make a word; each word has a meaning; this meaning originates from the power of knowledge; and the power of knowledge comes from the guru. When we have the knowledge of the mantra, the object of the mantra becomes manifest in our minds. For example: When we hear the word *cow*, we immediately visualize the form of a cow. This knowledge of 'cow' came to us from our parents or teachers who showed us a cow when we were children. During initiation, the guru tells us our mantra and explains its meaning. But our minds are so impure that we cannot understand if we hear it only once. So we should hear, repeat, and remember the mantra again and again; then only will it be awakened.

The awakening of the mantra is a difficult

subject. Without sadhana, one cannot understand the mystery of the mantra. It is not possible to awaken the mantra by reading books or listening to lectures. Vijay Krishna Goswami said:

When one unites the mantra, the guru, and the deity, the mantra awakens. The mantra is a mystical sound. The guru is the giver of knowledge. And the deity is the experience of that knowledge. The guru leads the disciple from dark ignorance to luminous knowledge by means of the mantra.

Here is an example: Suppose I tell you that there is a ghost in that banyan tree by the side of the road. After you hear this from me, you begin thinking about the ghost. You also know the meaning of the word *ghost*: a terrible, frightening spirit. One dark night you need to pass near that tree on an errand. All of a sudden, you remember the story of the ghost that I graphically described to you. As soon as you go under that banyan tree, your hair stands on end, your throat becomes dry, and you have terrible palpitations. As you look at the tree, a branch moves a little in the wind, and you either cry out 'Ghost! Ghost!' or fall unconscious. This is the experience of the ghost, which came from the awakening of the 'ghost' mantra. The word *ghost* is like the mantra; I am the guru who described that word to you; and your experience that there is a ghost in that tree is the deity of that ghost mantra.¹²

(To be continued)

References

1. Romain Rolland, *The Life of Ramakrishna*, trans. E F Malcolm-Smith (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1984), 276.
2. *Bhakta Manomohan* (Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, 1941), 58-9.
3. M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2002), 1027.
4. Swami Chetanananda, *They Lived with God* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1991), 206-7.
5. *Udbodhan*, vol. 38, 501-2.
6. *Spiritual Treasures*, trans. Swami Chetanananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1994), 204-5.
7. *Mahapurushjir Patravali* (Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, 1953), 253.
8. *A Guide to Spiritual Life*, trans. Swami Chetanananda (St Louis: Vedanta Society of St Louis, 1988), 146-7.
9. See Swami Virajananda, *Paramartha Prasanga: Towards the Goal Supreme* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1949), 234.
10. *Gospel*, 190.
11. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 7.407-8.
12. Vijay Krishna Goswami, *Ritambara*, 241-6.

Mantra Yoga

The practice of mantra yoga has its roots in the basic philosophy of the Word; this philosophy states that the universe is formed from sound vibration, the different levels of vibration forming words. Again that vibration, from another angle, is the vibration of the mind in a universe of ideas. Expressing these ideas are corresponding words, so that word vibrations and mind vibrations eventually merge into one Consciousness. It is Consciousness that appears as words, and it is Consciousness that appears as mind. Thus according to this philosophy, everything that a person experiences is the vibration of sounds. The ultimate Reality is God as sound, from which all other sound vibrations—as word and mind vibrations with their various concepts—come.

Through contemplation and meditation a stage can be reached where one's mind becomes totally fixed on Om as Shabda-Brahman, or Sound-Brahman. Sound vibration goes through the various strata of the mind deep into one's consciousness. All the mind's ideas slowly merge into Om, and eventually the subtlest sound merges into the soundless (*ashabda*) Brahman.

—Swami Shraddhananda, *Seeing God Everywhere*

Violated Divinity

(Continued from the previous issue)

Complaints against Jnanada became routine. She did not listen to anybody. She worked only when she felt like it. If anybody said anything on that count she had sharp replies ready. She insulted the matron every now and then. If her fellow inmates tried to pacify her she cold-shouldered them or snapped back: 'Better oil your own wheels!' Her conduct began to get regularly reported to me. But on being brought into my presence, she gave no answers to my questions. If I persisted, she would just say, 'You have heard everything from them, what else shall I say?'

Once I tried to tell her that she should behave as the others did, that it would secure an early release for her. But she cut me short, 'Oh! How long will you keep lecturing! Keep all that aside and hand out whatever punishment you have to. I am unable to keep standing any longer.' Soon after this she had to be put in solitary confinement for a serious offence.

Next week I went to Jnanada's small cell. Jail regulations required her to stand up when we went to her cell, but she did not bother—she remained sitting with her back to the wall. She looked up just for a moment and then kept gazing at the ground, her brows knitted in a frown.

After about a minute I asked her, 'Do you know how to read?' 'Why, how does that matter to you?' 'I just wanted to know if you would like to read some books.' She looked me up straight in the face and snapped, 'Are you joking?'

'What do you think you are doing, Jnanada?' shouted the matron. 'What should I be doing?' Jnanada shouted back. 'I am told that persons who have been "reported" cannot have books to read, and that is precisely what is happening here. Then why this question?'

What she said was true. Only those who behaved well could borrow books from the jail

library or get them through their relatives. Those who were reported for offences within the prison were not allowed reading material.

'I just want to know if you feel like reading something. Whether you will actually get anything to read or not is for me to decide.' 'Fine, you may give me something', Jnanada said rather disinterestedly. 'What book would you like?' 'What book! Send some storybook, if you have one. But I am not interested in your religious stuff and all those sermons.'

That was the time of the Muslim League government in Bengal. There was an unwritten rule about the 'ratio' of books; it was 'fifty-fifty'. Of what could pass as storybooks in our modest library there were only titles like *The Sultan's Exploits* and *Laila Bibi's Story*. These she would not read. After a careful search I came across a volume of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita (The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna)*. I don't know why, but I had the volume sent over to her.

When I went to her cell next week, she began speaking before I could say anything, 'What a fine book you sent! Is that what you call a storybook? I told you I can't stand all that religious rot. I haven't even opened it. There it is, you may take it back. If you want, you may send me some novel, like the ones the junior warder reads.'

The junior warder would smuggle in some detective thriller or cheap romance to read while on duty. Of course our librarian could not be expected to 'value' such books. So I had to speak up for the *Kathamrita*: 'Why are you letting the name scare you? That too is a storybook. It has many interesting stories. Why don't you read it once!'

When I went on my rounds fifteen days later, I was taken aback by Jnanada's appearance. It was as if she had been transformed by the touch of a magic wand. A tender grace had

replaced the aggressive demeanour and a soft diffidence had supplanted the shameless arrogance that used to pour through her eyes. She stood up respectfully as I looked at her in wonder. She smiled gently and said in a soft voice, 'Please tell them to open the door.'

The heavily grilled door was opened. The matron and the female warder immediately took up position beside me. After all she was a murderer and could not be trusted!

Jnanada came out slowly, her head bent low. She pulled the end of her sari over her neck and bent down near my feet to offer pranam. She said in an indistinct voice, 'I feel so happy today!' Then, giving me a wide-eyed look, she said, 'Is all that true? Was Thakur (Sri Ramakrishna) really like that? So unselfconscious, so simple, so kind! Did he really speak those beautiful words?'

In all probability, these were not questions. If they were, she was seeking the answers from her own self. My presence was merely the occasion for her to vocalize them; so I kept quiet. After a while I said, 'So you liked the book, didn't you?'

Jnanada closed her eyes as a soft smile of contentment spread across her face. After remaining thus absorbed for a while, she turned back and slowly returned to her cell.

A few days later there was another report in Jnanada's name. I called for Giribala and asked her what the matter was. She said, 'The clerk wanted the book back after fifteen days, but instead of returning the book Jnanada has fired a big verbal volley: "Report the matter if you wish; I will tell your chief what I have to."'

I felt sorry for Giribala. She had probably not come across another such character in her long career as a prison matron. But there was not much that I could do. So I said, 'If she does not want to return the book, drop the matter. What is the use of getting into trouble with her. I shall myself tell the clerk.' Of course Giribala did not like this miscarriage of justice.

Jnanada too had something to say. When I met her next week she said, 'Please give a scold-

ing to your clerk! Every now and then he sends someone to ask how long it will take me to finish a book this small. How am I to explain to him that this book can never be finished?'

Soon my term at the jail came to an end and I received my transfer orders. I walked into the female ward for the last time. Jnanada's solitary confinement was long over. But she had persuaded the matron to allow her to live alone. She stepped forward and touched my feet. As she stood up I found that her face was grave, her eyes were swollen, and a moist streak ran down her cheek. She said in a choked voice, 'Now they are going to snatch my *Kathamrita* away!' And a stream of tears coursed down her face.

'What if they take it away?' I said, 'You will be getting a new set of *Kathamrita* volumes, and they will be your own. Nobody will ever ask you to return them.' 'Really!' Jnanada's face brightened up. 'You have been very kind and affectionate. Allow me to ask one last thing of you. ... Will you give me something?'

'What is it?'

Jnanada came very close to me and said in a hushed tone, 'A photo of Thakur.'

Photographs were proscribed for the inmates and I was supposed to enforce the jail rules! But those tear-filled eyes would not take no for an answer. In spite of myself, I said, 'Yes, you will have it.'

The next day a set of *Kathamrita* volumes was deposited in Jnanada's name by a 'relative' of hers. Inside one of them was hidden a photograph of Sri Ramakrishna.

For years after that, whenever and wherever I saw Sri Ramakrishna's picture, the face of that tearful woman also appeared alongside. I felt terribly ashamed and guilty. A wretched woman by the side of a paramahansa! Then I realized that Sri Ramakrishna had himself given her a place near him. He had made this unfortunate girl, who had found shelter with none, his very own. The 'nectar of his words' had given her a new life—and I had been the means to that. That surely is no cause for shame; it is something I could be proud of! *



Reviews



*For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA
publishers need to send two copies of their latest publications.*

The Supreme Yoga: Yoga Vāsiṣṭha. *Swami Venkatesananda.* Motilal Banarsidass, 41 U A Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar, New Delhi 110 007. E-mail: mlbd@vsnl.com. 2003. xxvi + 382 pp. Rs 250.

The science of yoga was born in an age when mankind as a whole was presumably more enlightened, and could easily grasp truths for which our most advanced thinkers are still only groping. It is because the groping for those truths has begun again that great yogis have reintroduced this ancient science to humanity at large, and that people in great numbers are becoming receptive to it.

The *Yoga Vasishtha* is a unique work of Indian philosophy and it has been highly respected by spiritual seekers in India for several centuries. Its special appeal lies in its thoroughly rational approach, and in its presentation of Vedanta as a philosophy to bridge the gulf between the secular and the sacred, and action and contemplation, in human life through a comprehensive and lofty spirituality. For aspirants of the highest beatitude, the *Yoga Vasishtha* is like divine nectar. It expounds the highest doctrine with many stories and illustrations. One interesting thing about the book is that while most of the scriptures were narrated by God to His devotees, the *Yoga Vasishtha* was narrated to God Himself. These teachings of Sage Vasishtha imparted to Lord Rama contain the true understanding about the creation of the world, similar to that of Kashmir Shaivism. Its main teaching is that everything is Consciousness, including the material world. Our intellectual mind is often caught up in its own trap of logical questions like 'why'; it invents a 'why' and 'wherefore' to satisfy itself, conveniently ignoring inconvenient questions that still haunt it. Vasishtha demands direct observation of the mind, its motion, its energy, its reasoning, the assumed cause and the projected result, and even the observer, the observed and the observation—and the realization of their indivisible unity as infinite Consciousness.

Swami Venkatesananda, who has been working

untiringly for several decades to spread the eternal message of Yoga and Vedanta in the East and the West, has done a great service to spiritual seekers far and wide by bringing out this translation of the *Yoga Vasishtha*. Indeed, it is a masterful translation of the well-known Vedanta treatise in Sanskrit that enables the original text to be understood by both scholars and common people.

The book starts with 'Vairagya Prakarana' which deals with dispassion. On being asked by the devotee as to which one of the two is conducive to liberation, work or knowledge, Agastya replies that both work and knowledge together lead to the supreme goal.

The second chapter of the book, entitled 'Mumukshu Vyavahara Prakarana', deals with the highest wisdom of man, that is liberation or mukti from all kinds of bondage. A truly liberated soul is one who is not swayed by sense pleasure, and who is without the motive of name and fame.

The third to sixth chapters are primarily devoted to 'Utpatti Prakarana', 'Sthiti Prakarana', 'Upashama Prakarana' and 'Nirvana Prakarana'. In and through these chapters, the author has brought into the limelight the eternal conversation between the Lord and the devotee with regard to the highest truth of life.

In the words of Vasishtha, all the objects of the world are Brahman. It is an electrifying sound that the devotee hears when he utters: 'I am Brahman.' The mind, the intellect, the ego sense, the cosmic root elements, the senses and all such diverse phenomena are Brahman; only pleasure and pain are illusions. As a single sound produced amidst hills echoes and re-echoes into diversity, the one cosmic Consciousness experiences multiples within Itself with the notions of 'This is I', 'This is mine', and the like. The book concludes with the sayings of Rama addressed to Vasishtha: 'There is nothing I should do or should not do.' Saying so Rama places his head on the sage's feet and proclaims: 'Listen, all of you! There is nothing superior to Self-knowledge, nothing superior to the guru.'

Swami Venkatesananda has directed our atten-

tion to the eternal and immortal dialogue between Rama and Vasishtha so that, by listening to it, we are liberated by attaining the knowledge of Brahman. Swami Ranganathanandaji's foreword lends the book additional value. According to him: 'It is this philosophy of a comparative spirituality, rational and practical, that man in this modern age needs to rescue himself from his stagnation and worldliness and put him on the high road of creative living and fulfilment.'

May the book be a beacon light to those who are eternally struggling to come to the Light from the darkness of ignorance and nescience. This book, on the whole, is a must buy for every spiritual aspirant; it will go a long way in clearing some of the conventional doubts that torment the beginner and the initiated.

Prof. Amalendu Chakraborty

Former Head, Department of Philosophy
Presidency College, Kolkata

The Message of Mahabharata: The Nation's Magnum Opus. Justice P Kodandaramayya. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Kulapati Munshi Marg, Mumbai 400 007. E-mail: brbhavan@bom7.vsnl.net.in. 2004. lxxvi + 562 pp. Rs 300.

You cannot be brief when you wish to convey the message of the Mahabharata. The epic contains continents of wisdom. Justice Kodandaramayya has not found it an easy task to be selective. The result is a commendable and breezy projection of many vital areas in this epic of Vyasa's. The three parts together with a set of informative appendices make the sumptuous volume a meaningful gift to the young generation.

In keeping with the importance of the eighteen-day war in Kurukshetra, each part has eighteen chapters. The first part is a colourful representation of subjects like cosmology, cosmogony, sages, heavenly damsels and even the defence equipment perfected by our ancestors of the heroic age. The reader gets an insight into many interesting topics—the different types of arrows for instance: *kṣura*, *vatsadanta*, *nārāca*, *bhalla* and the rest.

On the impossibly difficult subject of dharma, we get eighteen chapters. There are both general (*sadharana*) and specific (*vishesha*) rules, ones that are used appropriately to gain the four *purusharthas*. Nowhere in the epic do we find a running away from

life. Adharma is rampant, but one must face it boldly and seek to lead a pure life. As a judge, Kodandaramayya must have dealt with adharma's many facets every day in the court room. Naturally he has reproduced the *yaksha-prashna* episode in its entirety in the second part. This is distilled wisdom. How does one measure the values of simple living? To Yaksha's question, 'Who is happy?' Yudhishtira answers: 'That one is truly happy who cooks in his own house scanty vegetables in the fifth or sixth portion of the day, but who is neither in debt nor exiled from home.'

It should astonish us no end that what is essentially a whirlpool of fraternal hatred should turn out to be a dharmashastra. Part Three demonstrates that the storyline itself is a means to educate the common man about desire and thirst, food and sleep, *pravritti* and *nivritti* dharmas. *Pravritti* and *nivritti* are not diametrical opposites. The former stations itself on the need to discharge one's duties in this world by acquiring power through work and tapasya, the latter is based on the knowledge of the Self which leads to self-control so that one would not abuse the power gained by action. Power associated with truth alone can protect mankind from peril.

The Message of Mahabharata, thus, needs to have a central place in our shelves. There are repetitions and the jerky style is at times irritating. Painsstaking editing of the text is a must for future editions of this welcome publication.

Dr Prema Nandakumar

Researcher and Literary Critic
Srirangam

Glimpses of the Past: Essays on Sister Nivedita and Her Contemporaries. Sudeshna Basak. K P Bagchi, 286 B B Ganguli Street, Kolkata 700 012. 2004. 82 pp. Rs 120.

Sister Nivedita was a multifaceted personality who came in contact with a wide spectrum of people and engaged in a wide range of activities that even now have social relevance and make for interesting study and reading. The author, Dr Sudeshna Basak, is a historian and educator. She has evaluated Sister Nivedita's contributions in different fields of Indian life—religion, education, art, politics and literature.

The junction of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw a great deal of activity in India, espe-

cially in Bengal society, and Sister Nivedita, the fiery Irish disciple of Swami Vivekananda was sucked into it after the latter's mahasamadhi. She was trained by Swami Vivekananda to work for Indian women. She did a remarkable amount of work in her short life and was instrumental in energizing the moribund women and youth of India and enthusing the freedom fighters. She also had to face a lot of criticism from the British administration for obvious reasons. Unfortunately Nivedita has not received the attention due to her from the Indian Historical Congress. This work is a contribution towards setting that record straight.

The author has drawn on her earlier academic work in this book, the first part of which is really a collection of five articles that were published in various journals. The second half of the book has articles on four remarkable contemporaries of Nivedita: Aghore Kamini Devi, Pandita Ramabai, Sakham Ganesh Deuskar and Sarat Chandra Chatterjee. All of them were connected at some point in time with Bihar, an association which is of primary research interest to the author.

The author hopes that through this work other parts of India, apart from Bengal, would get to know more about Sister Nivedita's dedication and sacrifices. For this reason alone this small book deserves to be read.

Swami Satyamayananda
Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata

Sri Ramakrishna Suprabhatam. Ottur Unni Namboothiripad. Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Kayamkulam, Dt Alleppey 690 502. E-mail: kaivalya9@sify.com. 2004. 126 pp. Rs 60.

Suprabhatam literally means 'good morning'. In Sanskrit literature it indicates a devotional poem chanted early in the morning to invoke the blessings of a god or goddess. It highlights the excellences of the deity and craves for divine protection. The *suprabhatam* addressed to Lord Venkateshwara of Tirupati is justly famous and is fervently chanted by millions. Following this model, *suprabhatams* relating to other deities have been composed by poets.

It is natural that the *yuga avatara*, the Incarnation of the age, should likewise be invoked by devotees. There are already two morning hymns addressed to Sri Ramakrishna published by the Rama-

krishna Math. But this *suprabhatam* by Ottur stands on a distinct pedestal. Ottur was a gifted poet whose hobby was to compose devotional poems galore in Sanskrit and Malayalam, and he did this with remarkable ease. Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Krishna of Guruvayur were his darling chosen ideals and his pure heart considered both these divinities as the same.

In this *suprabhatam* Ottur's word-magic paints a magnificent picture of Sri Ramakrishna's charming personality and gives in capsule form the leading events in Sri Guru Maharaj's challenging life. To chant these one hundred verses with fervour is equivalent to performing a memorable yajna. These mellifluous lines indeed bring Sri Ramakrishna alive before us.

This morning hymn was first published serially in the Malayalam monthly *Thulasee Sugandham* in the 1960s. It has now been edited and published by Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Kayamkulam. In order that it may reach a wider public, the present edition carries the text not only in Sanskrit but also its transliterations as well as translations in Malayalam, English and Tamil. This is an innovation that has to be warmly welcomed. The publishers have plans to extend the transliterations and translations to other Indian languages also. Thereby we can say 'good morning' to Sri Ramakrishna in a variety of tongues. Not only do all dharmas but also all tongues belong to him.

C S Ramakrishnan
Former Editor, *Vedanta Kesari*
Ramakrishna Math, Chennai

Quest for Grace. Swami Ramanujananda. Ramakrishna Math, Puranattukara, Thirissur 680 551. E-mail: srkmtsr@sanchar.net.in. 2003. 170 pp. Rs 40.

The Vedas speak of man as a child of immortality (*amritasya putrah*). Caught in the web of creation, he quite forgets his divine origin as also his goal, which is the Divine. A little help from a realized soul, and marvellous becomes his journey of aspiration in this life. Swami Ramanujananda keeps before us the message of such a realized soul in *Quest for Grace*. Tulsidas's *Vinay Patrika* is as relevant to our spiritual life as is his *Ramcharitmanas*. Its 279 poems reveal Rama as the absolute Reality, and Swami Ramanujananda's pellucid translations do

give a clear idea of the soul-moving strains of the Hindi original.

Vinay Patrika teaches us to avoid sectarian animosity (Tulsidas hails Ganesha, Shiva, Parvati) and honour water streams like the Ganga. We get a full view of the holiness of Benares through legends and enjoy the full-throated prayers to Hanuman. Throughout the poems Tulsidas's faith in Rama's grace is firm. Of course earthly life is full of sorrows and man's condition is pitiable:

O Lord, day and night I have to dance.
From the moment I got the epithet of jiva,
I have no rest.
Desires are the clothings,
And greed etc. are the ornaments;
Putting them on, the dance continues.

But then Rama always loves His servant and so grace will not be denied to the devotee: Ahalya, Guha, Sugriva, Jambavan, Vibhishana, Shabari, Jatayu—the list is endless! Tulsidas also teaches us that external rituals are not all. One's worship consists not in the mere pouring of ghee into fire: 'Let forgiveness be the fire; let love be the ghee.' Worship of Rama does gift us miraculous powers. What are they? The chasing away of sins, a mind brought under control, the destruction of lust, an increase in happiness, prosperity, satisfaction and knowledge. Are not these greater miracles?

Essentially, *Vinay Patrika* is an address to Rama to free Tulsidas from the sorrows of this Kali yuga, and such is our prayer too. Swami Ramanujananda has deftly turned the presentation into a dramatic dialogue, which is educative, explanatory and delightful. The beautiful production has Deepak Damu's cover design inviting us to take up our own quest for grace.

Dr Prema Nandakumar

Biography of Lord Sri Ram. *Comp. and trans. Ajai Kumar Chhawchharia.* 36A Rajghat Colony, Parikrama Marg, PO Ayodhya, Faizabad 224 123. 2004. ix + 293 pp. Rs 100.

A devotee, out of his deep conviction and faith, tries to prove the historicity and greatness of his chosen deity, resulting in the book under review. The reader can feel the exuberance of pulsating faith in each page and must look at this work through the eyes of the devotee. The book unfortunately starts

with a corrigendum, acknowledging the numerous spelling errors that have escaped the author's scrutiny. The promise of a rectified next edition gives hope.

In the preface the compiler states that the purpose of the book is to introduce the major selected works of Goswami Tulsidas to non-Hindi-speaking people. The portions included are *Vairagya Sandipani*, *Vinay Patrika*, *Geetavali*, *Kavitavali*, *Dohavali* and extracts from the *Ramcharitmanas*. The book is divided into two parts. Part A narrates the life story of Sri Rama through verses selected from the above sources. The compiler has a deep grasp of all the above-mentioned texts and elaborately quotes from them to weave a colorful and comprehensive picture of Rama. He carefully provides the verse number to authenticate each statement and the translation is quite lucid and free-flowing. Translations of Sanskrit quotations from the Upanishads have not been included and this may deter the unfamiliar reader.

The first chapter is a prayer from the *Padma Purana* and delineates the various names of Rama and their significance. The story of Rama, as dealt with by Tulsidas follows in the next nine chapters. The compiler has included a sample of Tulsidas's handwritten manuscript too. In Chapter Eleven the author tries to trace the characters and events of the Ramayana to the Vedas and Upanishads. The conclusions drawn are very involved and unconvincing. Building up historical evidence requires precision and the book fails in achieving this purpose.

The compiler tries to determine the period of Rama's rule, exile, etc. from the details found in the *Ramcharitmanas* and other cryptic clues. He goes to the extent of suggesting that Rama and his ancestors were extra-terrestrial beings who escaped to earth in a spacecraft and continued to live here. Aryan invasion and such concocted theories have already created enough dissension and are tainted with racial discrimination. Such ideas must not find credence and Rama, a symbol of gentlemanly behaviour, must not be subjected to such travesty. The translator should have given more emphasis to the ideals that Rama represents rather than his historicity. An act of devotion and faith needs more care. But one hopes the learned compiler will bring out careful translations of other rare texts in the future.

Swami Atmajnananda

Editor, *Viveka Prabha*
Ramakrishna Ashrama, Mysore

Reports

New Temple

Srimat Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, dedicated the newly built Sri Ramakrishna temple, with a marble image of Sri Ramakrishna, at **Ramakrishna Math, Nagpur**, on 10 February 2006.

From the 6th to the 10th, a series of ceremonies, beginning with the Vishnu Panchayatana Yaga and ending with the Purnahuti, were performed.

On the 10th, at 7.30 in the morning, photographs of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda, Swami Shivananda (the founder of the centre) and Swami Akhandananda (who had once visited the place) were taken in a procession led by monks. After three circumambulations, the procession entered the new temple, where Most Revered President Maharaj offered an *arghya* to Sri Ramakrishna

and performed the first *mangalarati*. Then followed a number of short rituals and after the chanting of auspicious hymns the assembled monks offered *pushpanjali*. Around 8 o'clock the new temple was opened for devotees and the public. Thereafter prasad was distributed to all.

The atmosphere was charged with religious fervour throughout the function, which, to say the least, was a sight for the gods to see.

At 11 o'clock, Most Revered President Maharaj also opened the Swami Akhandananda Sabhagriha, a hall in the temple basement. The hall has been so named in order to preserve the sacred memory of the swami, who had stayed in the hall of the old temple while he was in Nagpur.

A variety of religious and cultural programmes that were organized by the centre between 8 and 14 February lent the temple conse-



cration added glitter. Most Reverend President Maharaj, Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj and Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj, Vice President and General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission respectively, and other distinguished persons addressed various public meetings. On the 9th Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj released a commemorative volume and a parliament of religions was organized on the 11th. Cultural programmes included musical performances and bhajans by renowned artists and vocalists and dramatic performances by the students of Sri Sant Gajanan Maharaj Warkari Shikshan Sanstha, Shegaon, and Vivekananda Vidya-pith, Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narainpur—all of which ensured that the pandal was always full! On the 12th the centre performed Narayana Seva at which 3,000 poor people were sumptuously fed.

In all, 381 monastics and about 9,000 devotees attended the week-long festivities organized on this occasion.

National Youth Day Celebrations

Headquarters and the following centres celebrated the National Youth Day on 12 January (main programmes are given in parentheses):

Headquarters along with **Saradapitha, Belur** (processions, speeches, recitations, music, audio-drama, yogasana demonstration), **Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata** (speeches, music, question-answer session), **Agartala** (procession and public meetings addressed by Tripura Youth Affairs Minister and others), **Allahabad** (youth camp), **Bankura** (procession, seminar, cultural competitions), **Bhubaneswar** (national-integration camp), **Chapra** (procession, public meeting presided over by Bihar Youth Affairs Minister), **Chennai Math** (public meeting, essay-writing competition in which about 80,000 students from 800 schools and colleges participated), **Ghatshila** (procession, public meeting), **Jamshedpur** (procession, public meetings, seminar, music, cultural competi-

tions), **Kamarpukur** (speeches, recitations, cultural programmes), **Kanpur** (cultural competitions), **Limbdi** (procession, public meeting), **Lucknow** (quiz and debate competitions), **Manasadwip** (public meeting, recitations, music), **Mangalore** (procession, cultural competitions), **Nagpur** (procession, recitation competition, symposium), **New Delhi** (speeches, recitations, music, martial-arts demonstration), **Porbandar** (youth convention addressed by President Dr A P J Abdul Kalam), **Port Blair** (procession, cultural competitions, public meeting addressed by the Lt Governor of Andaman and Nicobar), **Puri Math** (procession, public meeting, cultural programme), **Raipur** (public meeting), **Ranchi Sanatorium** (procession, public meeting), **Shillong** (music, debate competition), **Swami Vivekananda's Ancestral House** (speeches, seminar, drama, music, yogasana demonstration), **Thiruvananthapuram** (quiz competition, public meeting), **Vrindaban** (youth convention).

News from Branch Centres

On 23 December 2005 (the 152nd birth anniversary of Sri Sarada Devi), Most Reverend President Maharaj laid the foundation stone for the central administrative building of the newly



formed deemed university **Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Educational and Research Institute (RKMVERI)**. Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj and Swami Smarananandaji were also present. Swami Nirmuktanandaji Maharaj, a

very senior monk and disciple of Swami Shivanandaji also graced the occasion. In all about 100 sannyasins and brahmacharins were present.

A 3-day function consisting of two youth conventions, a devotees' convention, lectures, cultural programmes and welfare activity was



held at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Belgaum**, from 27 to 29 January 2006 to mark the second anniversary of the consecration of the centre's temple. The main aim of these celebrations was to spread the life-giving messages of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda among the people, to present before the youth higher ideals of life, and to promote Indian culture. About 1,400 people took part in the programmes, which had two special events: the unveiling of a beautiful statue of Swami Vivekananda on the 27th and free distribution of wheelchairs to physically challenged persons on the 28th.

Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Coimbatore, organized the concluding function of its platinum jubilee from 27 January to 5 February. The 10-day function comprised public meetings, cultural programmes, cultural competitions, seminars, and the like. Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj unveiled a newly installed bronze statue of Swami Vivekananda on 3 February.

The Vivekananda School of Mathematical Sciences under RKMVERI received its first overseas visiting research faculty in Dr Lawrence Reeves of the University of Melbourne,

who visited the School for ten days, between 13 and 23 February. During this period he delivered a couple of talks and interacted with research scholars and teachers of universities and colleges in West Bengal engaged in research in hyperbolic geometry, geometric group theory and geometric topology. The School has lately been having plenty of academic activities in pure mathematics, and Dr Reeves's visit certainly capped it all.

Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj inaugurated the newly renovated neurosurgery ward of the Vivekananda Polyclinic run by **Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Lucknow**, on 14 February. He also presided over the lamp-lighting ceremony of the first batch of BSc (honours) students of the Polyclinic's nursing school on the 17th. On the 18th, Sri T V Rajeswar, Governor of Uttar Pradesh, visited the Sevashrama and participated in the 37th dedication-day celebration of the Polyclinic.

Relief and Rehabilitation

A total of 1,789 blankets were distributed through the following Ramakrishna Math and Mission centres to poor people affected by the severity of winter in February 2006: Dinajpur, Bangladesh (395), Katihar (200), New Delhi (534), Rahara (45), and Visakhapatnam (615). Apart from the above, the Dinajpur centre also distributed 83 sweaters and 25 woollen chadars, and the Katihar centre 436 shawls.

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Puri, distributed 132 kg rice, 64 blankets, 137 dhotis, 110 saris, 64 towels, 124 plates and 124 bowls, and 77 sets of school stationery to 64 families whose houses were destroyed by a devastating fire in Gopapuria Patapur, Khurda.

Ramakrishna Mission, Dinajpur, distributed 484 saris and 334 dhotis to poor villagers of the locality.

Ramakrishna Mission Boys' Home, Rahara, renovated a school building at Sandeshkhali in North 24-Parganas, sunk a tube well at Sardana in South 24-Parganas, and distributed 30 saris to poor village women. *